Summary Report

Roundtables on the Future of the Alberta Economy: A Continuing Journey

May 1992

The Banff Centre for Management

TOWARD 2000 TOGETHER

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The views and opinions expressed in this report represent the input received by the Banff Centre for Management and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Government of Alberta.

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The Banff Centre for Management

May 8, 1992

The Honourable Peter Elzinga
Minister of Economic Development and Trade
324 Legislature Building
Edmonton, Alberta
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The Honourable Rick Orman
Minister of Energy
Chairman, Economic Planning Cabinet Committee
228 Legislature Building
Edmonton, Alberta
T5K 2B6

Dear Ministers Elzinga and Orman:

The seven Roundtables on the Future of the Alberta Economy undertaken as a result of the government's "Toward 2000 Together" initiative are now complete, and I am pleased to present you with this summary report. Because of the dynamic nature of this undertaking, the work involved in organizing and carrying out this "journey of exploration" was far more than we ever expected. It has, however, been a stimulating and rewarding experience for our team.

We are confident that we achieved all the main goals established with you before the process began. We are delighted with the type of commitment we received from the various participants, and our sense is that they were most pleased with what we jointly accomplished.

I want to thank the Government of Alberta for giving us the financial and moral support to undertake these roundtables, and for allowing us a free hand to organize and operate the sessions at arm's length from the government. We are proud of what we accomplished, and we hope that both of you, as the key initiators and supporters of the roundtables, are also pleased with the results.

This document is a summary report which covers the philosophy, methodology and results of the roundtable process as a whole, and gives a sense of the discussion that went on in each individual roundtable. As you no doubt realize, there is a wide variety of other materials available from the roundtables, including background papers, selected readings and synthesis reports on each roundtable. As well, we are considering the preparation of some teaching modules based on the materials we generated and used in the roundtables.

As a result of further support from the government, film material on the roundtables will soon be available. I want to take this opportunity to commend the crew from ACCESS Network (Fred Keating, John Verburgt, Brenda Nesdoly and Trevor Wilson) for their high standard of professionalism and their sensitivity and insight into what the roundtables were all about. I expect the program(s) they produce will add considerable value to the "Toward 2000 Together" process and will give the government and other provincial organizations valuable material to aid in the public education process.

The ongoing effort to develop a new economic strategy for the province and to broaden public awareness of the realities of the "new world" is one in which the roundtable participants are eager to participate. Our team at the Banff Centre for Management stands ready to assist in this effort. In closing, let me again thank you for giving us the opportunity to make this contribution.

Sincerely,

D G Simpson

Donald G. Simpson
Vice-President and Director

ROUNDTABLES ON THE FUTURE OF THE ALBERTA ECONOMY:

A CONTINUING JOURNEY

May 1992

CONTENTS

PART I THE ROUNDTABLE JOURNEY

I THE CONCEPT 1

Coming to Terms with Fundamental Change 1
Contributing to "Toward 2000 Together" 3

II THE CHALLENGES 4

Determining the Themes 4
Enlisting Participants 5
Discovering New Worlds 6
Evolving a Process 8
Developing Shared Language and Vision 8
A Continuing Journey 10

III THE RESULTS 12

Establishing Context 12
Reporting Progress 12
Emerging Themes 13
Moving Forward 18

PART II EXCERPTS FROM THE JOURNEY'S LOG

Roundtable #1: *"Towards an Innovation-Driven Economy"*
Fort McMurray, November 22-24 23

Roundtable #2: *"The Creative Financing and Delivery of Public Services: Searching for New Opportunities for Public/Private Partnerships"*
Lethbridge, January 17-19 31

Roundtable #3: *"The Greening of Alberta Business: Competitive Disadvantage or Commercial Advantage?"*
Medicine Hat, January 31 - February 2 37

Roundtable #4: *"Creating Competitive Advantage through a Knowledge-Based Economy"*
Calgary, February 14-16 43

Roundtable #5: *"Managing Diversity: The Impact of Changing Demographics and Immigration on the Economy"*
Grande Prairie, March 13-15 49

Roundtable #6: *"Cities and the Wealth of Nations: The Role of Municipalities in Developing an Innovation-Driven Economy"*
Edmonton, March 20-22 55

Roundtable #7: *"Prospects for Partnership: Public, Private and Labour Relations in the 90's"*
Red Deer, April 3-5 61

APPENDICES

A Roundtable Organizers

B Roundtable Participants

PART I

THE ROUNDTABLE JOURNEY

British author Charles Handy has suggested that the age we are entering is an "Age of Unreason," an age in which the most productive ideas may stem from "upside down" thinking, an age

> *when the future, in so many areas, is there to be shaped, by us and for us; a time when the only prediction that will hold true is that no predictions will hold true; a time, therefore, for bold imaginings in private life as well as public, for thinking the unlikely and doing the unreasonable.*

Let the journey continue...

Excerpt from Dr. Donald G. Simpson's opening remarks at the first "Roundtable on the Future of the Alberta Economy," Fort McMurray, November 22-24, 1991

I THE CONCEPT

Coming to Terms with Fundamental Change

The concept of the Roundtables on the Future of the Alberta Economy grew out of a sense that we are living through one of those periods in history in which major shifts take place in the way we view the world and organize our lives in it -- periods that it is always easier to recognize and define in retrospect. Albertans, like all Canadians, are finding themselves bombarded with messages about global change, about Canada's lack of competitiveness, about the decline in our ability to create wealth, and about the bleak future we face if we do not take immediate steps to remedy the situation. "Bad news" indicators abound: plant closures, layoffs, bankruptcies, mounting public debt. In the past, we have assumed that such recessions are cyclical downturns in the economy, and that we should concentrate on "riding out the storm" in the expectation that good times will return in due course.

A New Era

The premise underlying this series of roundtables is that this time something more fundamental is happening: we are entering a new economic era. If we are to thrive in this new order, we will need to let go of many of the assumptions and frameworks that have served us well in the past as organizing principles for our economic activity. We will need to develop new "mental maps" to guide us through a changing world. We will need to find new ways of organizing ourselves to take advantage of the opportunities this world presents. We will need to evolve new visions of Alberta's place in the world, and to create new structures and processes to move us towards our vision.

> *I think that we're coming to grips with the fact that what we're talking about here is largely a matter of social change, not merely a matter of incidental structural change.*
>
> *Participant comment*

A Multi-Disciplinary Approach

It was in the context of these challenges to traditional thinking that the Honourable Rick Orman, Minister of Energy and Chairman of the Economic Planning Cabinet Committee, approached the Banff Centre for Management in the spring of 1991, and asked the Centre to develop a process for bringing together diverse groups of creative thinkers to take an in-depth, cross-disciplinary look at the economic challenges and opportunities facing the province over the next several years. The idea of creating a series of arm's-length forums across the province had grown out of discussions that took place during a retreat session of the Economic Planning Cabinet Committee early in 1990. The intent was to put in place a process that would complement and support other streams of the "Toward 2000 Together" public consultation initiative announced by Premier Getty, Energy Minister Rick Orman, and Economic Development and Trade Minister Peter Elzinga on August 29, 1991.

The Banff Centre for Management shared the sense that traditional sectoral approaches are proving to be inadequate tools for dealing with the increasingly complex issues and problems that seem to characterize the new economy. We were (and are) convinced that our ability to sustain and improve the quality of life in the future will depend on the creation of a more interdisciplinary and holistic approach to economic activity -- an approach that builds on a dynamic collaboration among business, government, labour, the education and scientific communities, cultural and other not-for-profit organizations.

> *All students of man and society who possess that first requisite for so difficult a study, a due sense of its difficulties, are aware that the besetting danger is not so much of embracing falsehood for truth, as of mistaking part of the truth for the whole.*
>
> *From John Stuart Mill, "Bentham", 1838*

We felt that the roundtables could serve as useful mechanisms for synthesizing available information, generating innovative ideas for action, and recommending starting points for the implementation of new approaches and projects in both the public and private sectors. We also sensed that the roundtable process would contribute to the shaping of simple images and metaphors that convey the essence

of the changes taking place in the world, and that help people internalize and act on a clearer understanding of current reality.

Contributing to "Toward 2000 Together"

> *Regardless of how we alter the decision-making process, we still require for effective implementation the enrollment of the populace in whatever decisions are made.*
>
> *Participant comment*

Through the Government of Alberta's "Toward 2000 Together" process, Albertans have been actively involved over the past eight months in developing an economic strategy that will enable the province to prosper in the next century. Running concurrently with the various public consultation activities initiated by government, but at arm's length from government, the roundtables are intended to provide an additional non-partisan and independent source of public input.

The Roundtable Sessions

Between November of 1991 and April of 1992, seven weekend roundtable sessions, each devoted to a different theme, were held in various locations around the province:

November 22-24, 1991	**Fort McMurray:** *Towards an Innovation-Driven Economy*
January 17-19, 1992	**Lethbridge:** *The Creative Financing and Delivery of Public Services: Searching for New Opportunities for Public/Private Partnerships*
January 31-February 2, 1992	**Medicine Hat:** *The Greening of Alberta Business: Competitive Disadvantage or Commercial Advantage?*
February 14-16, 1992	**Calgary:** *Creating Competitive Advantage through a Knowledge-Based Economy*
March 13-15, 1992	**Grande Prairie:** *Managing Diversity: The Impact of Changing Demographics and Immigration on the Economy*

March 20-22, 1992 **Edmonton:**
Cities and the Wealth of Nations: The Role of Municipalities in Developing an Innovation-Driven Economy

April 3-5, 1992 **Red Deer:**
Prospects for Partnership: Public, Private and Labour Relations in the 90's

II THE CHALLENGES

While the Government of Alberta funded the development and management of the roundtables, the Banff Centre for Management was commissioned to design and facilitate the series at arm's length from government. The challenges facing the project team assembled by the Centre were

- to establish themes that provided a useful framework for discussion, without imposing preconceived approaches or conclusions;
- to bring together for each roundtable a small group of participants with varied experience, expertise, perspectives and viewpoints;
- to create an environment in each roundtable conducive to innovative and productive thought;
- to set a shared context around each discussion theme;
- to facilitate the process of the roundtable sessions without presuming to direct or to lead;
- to capture the essence of each roundtable in a reporting document.

Determining the Themes

A Sensitivity to Language

The seven themes were established early in the process as a first rough cut at identifying the cross-disciplinary issues that would prove key to the future of the Alberta economy. While they have served us well as general signposts for our collective voyage, our understanding of their scope and implications has, of course, been changed and shaped by the groups of participants who explored each issue with us. We have become increasingly conscious throughout the roundtable process of the importance of weighing the implications and connotations of each word, and would now use different language to get at many of the same concerns. Some of the groups' deliberations on the appropriateness of certain words and phrases are captured in the summaries of the roundtable sessions found in **Part II** of this document.

Enlisting Participants

Unlike most of the "Toward 2000" activities, the roundtables were "invitation only" events. We felt that it was important to keep the groups small, so that each individual would get an opportunity to contribute fully to the discussion. As interest in the roundtables grew over the five-month period, it became more and more difficult to stick to our optimal limits. We began in Fort McMurray with 19 participants. At the Calgary session, in February, we had 38. At each of the last six roundtables we had one or two participants from previous roundtables providing continuity and a link with the work of the other groups.

The logistics of getting the right mix of people at each roundtable session was a major challenge that was rendered even more difficult by a tight timeline. Instead of determining a list of stakeholder groups and then inviting each group to send a representative, we chose to seek out individuals who showed an interest in thinking broadly and creatively about complex issues. While we needed to ensure that a full range of expertise and perspectives was represented at the table, we wanted participants who were willing to "brainstorm" and speculate, not just to serve as the official voice of their organization. For this reason, the actual sessions were closed to the press and public, although in some roundtables media people contributed as participants, and background papers and summary comments on the roundtables were made available to the local press.

> *We need to dream bigger dreams.*
>
> *Participant comment*

The Roundtable "Crew"

We were overwhelmingly impressed with the calibre and commitment of the roundtable participants, who not only gave up their weekend, but also paid their own travel and accommodation expenses to take part in the sessions. In drawing up invitation lists, we worked with the Banff Centre's network of associates and contacts around the country, with the Alberta government, and increasingly with recommendations from roundtable "alumni" themselves. At each session, we had a good mix of people from the public sector (several cabinet ministers and senior government officials formed part of our crew), from private sector business, from not-for-profit organizations, and from education. Most sessions had labour representatives. We invited one or two people from outside of the province to each roundtable, to share their experiences and expertise with the group.

While we also worked toward a representative mix in the areas of gender and ethnic background, we had less success in achieving this goal. We talked in the course of the roundtables of the inherent difficulties in bringing marginalized and disadvantaged groups into this type of process -- especially when the structure assumes that participants can cover many of the costs of their attendance -- and we made a commitment to thinking through better ways of reaching out to these groups in any of our future activities.

Discovering New Worlds

Once inside the room, participants agreed that they would cease to "represent" any one position or set of interests -- they were simply fellow travellers, faced with the challenge of deciding together where their voyage might be taking them, how they needed to prepare for the trip, and what signposts would tell them they were travelling in useful directions. We have referred earlier to the roundtable "crew." Faced in each roundtable with a diverse group -- many of them strangers to us and to each other -- and very little time (the sessions ran from Friday evening to Sunday noon), the Centre for Management team chose to establish a sense of shared context through the metaphor of a "journey of adventure to discover new worlds."

> *We shall not cease from exploration*
> *And the end of all our exploring*
> *Will be to arrive where we started*
> *And know the place for the first time.*
>
> *T.S. Eliot, from "Four Quartets," 1942*

Creating New Maps

The suggestion was put to the group that over the past two or three decades, new technologies and a variety of global changes have been combining to create a world that is every bit as new and uncharted to us as that which Columbus encountered 500 years ago was to him. Columbus's discovery was a land mass previously unknown to the European world, to which one could travel more quickly and easily as the physical maps were created and refined. The "new world" of the 1990's is more nebulous and somewhat terrifying: it is the world of a new "global economy," and it is not a place that we travel to, but rather a world in which we find ourselves journeying without ever leaving our home or place of business.

A Spirit of Exploration

We have crossed into unknown territory, and while the navigation instruments by which we have travelled in the past are not useless, they are no longer adequate. Part of our ongoing struggle on the journey has been to re-interpret the maps we are currently using in the light of our experience of a new world, to be ready and willing to abandon tools that have worked for us in the past but will not be helpful on this new voyage, and to work together to create the new maps and instruments that will help us understand more clearly where we are and where we're going.

It is not always easy to let go of assumptions and frameworks that have served us well for many years. In plenary sessions and in small working groups over the course of each roundtable weekend, we challenged ourselves and each other to do just this -- to momentarily "suspend disbelief" and to engage in some creative "lateral" and "upside-down" thinking. We wanted to break out -- at least

temporarily -- of the "paradigms" or "mental boxes" that we use to make sense of the world, and to abandon ourselves to our sense of curiosity and spirit of exploration.

Focus on Innovation

A central theme of the roundtable process was that the capacity to **innovate** would be the key to our success in this new world -- using the word "innovation" in the broadest sense of the word to cover the invention of new products, the development of new processes, and the creation of a new context for our economic activities.

> *Discussions of "competitiveness" and "excellence" often draw on analogies of wartime battles and speak of "heroic acts of will" to reach some future goal. But most goals are not achieved by single acts of will, even heroic ones. They are achieved by sustained acts of will, that is by a change of habit, of custom and of culture.*
>
> *From Max Dublin, Futurehype, 1989*

"A Culture Shift"

We talked of the need to undergo a "culture shift" or change in mindset -- a change that allows us to move beyond our initial assumptions, to challenge traditional beliefs and practices, to live with the ambiguity and paradox surrounding complex and multi-dimensional problems and issues, to entertain many different "answers" at once, and to use them to create innovative solutions and actions.

In each roundtable we used the tools of humour, metaphor and analogy to shake us out of old patterns of thought and to spark innovative ideas and speculations. We made ourselves move beyond the paradigms of "either/or" and "win/lose," to contemplate such seemingly contradictory concepts as "collaborative competition." We tried to move beyond "left brain" or linear approaches by drawing images of our perceptions of current reality, and of our visions for the future.

> *One untapped source of motivation, inspiration and energy may be the human capacity for humour ....Beyond its therapeutic benefit, humour also exercises the very faculties and skills that contribute to creativity. The mental activity of humour involves surprise, discontinuity, and the gymnastic connection of new conclusions, new realizations. The same thought processes apply to creative thinking in business.*
>
> *John Dalla Costa, Meditations on Business, 1991*

Evolving a Process

It was suggested by the trip's navigators that our collective notions of what a "roundtable process" was about might undergo a change in this "new world" into which are moving. In the past, participants in this type of session might have concentrated simply on the **content** aspects of the exercise:

- **presenting** our individual expertise to the group;
- **synthesizing** what was presented;
- **acting** on the ideas presented.

Context for Change

In this series of roundtables, we were also trying to create a **context for change**:

- **creating** new knowledge from the collective experience and expertise of a diverse group of individuals;
- **innovating** in our exploration of how this new knowledge will shape our actions as individuals, as organizations and as a society;
- **moving** our collective thought and action forward.

> *What's happening with some of these new processes that are coming forward is that not only is it gaining consensus as opposed to dividing things down the middle -- either/or -- it is in fact driving innovation by getting people from the "poles" together and looking for a solution that's better for both instead of just making some kind of arbitrary division.*
>
> *Participant comment*

Developing Shared Language and Vision

Defining a Changing Reality

This type of process depends on honest and clear communication, and on the sharing of an articulated vision and goals. But language is a human construct that always lags slightly behind the reality it attempts to reflect. At the core of our struggle to define a changing reality is the problem of finding a shared language that will allow us to move ahead to take the action that is required.

> *A horizon of invisibility cuts across the geography of modern culture. Those who have passed through it cannot put their experience into familiar words and images because the languages they have inherited are inadequate to the new worlds they inhabit. They therefore express themselves in metaphors, paradoxes, contradictions, and abstractions rather than languages that "mean" in the traditional way....The most obvious case in point is modern physics, which confronts so many paradoxes that physicists like Paul Dirac and Werner Heisenberg have concluded that traditional languages are, for better or worse, simply unable to represent the world that science has forced on them.*
>
> *O.B. Hardison Jr., Disappearing through the Skylight, 1989*

In each roundtable, we found ourselves facing in microcosm what may be some of the major challenges of this new world: finding a common language in which to talk of new concepts and phenomena that cannot be easily measured or defined, and building a shared vision and sense of purpose among a group of highly intelligent people with diverse backgrounds and perspectives. We struggled to determine

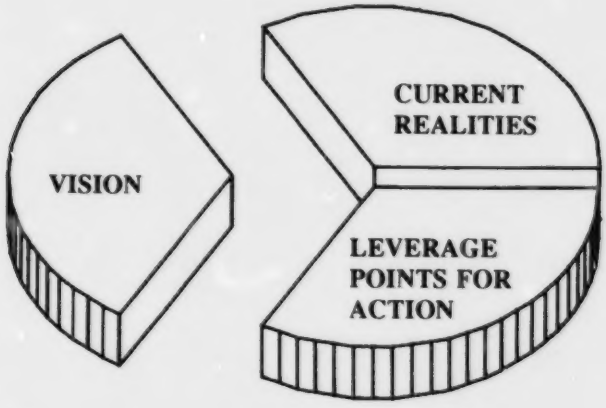
- what new language we could create to articulate to others the kind of world we are inhabiting, or want to inhabit in the future;
- how we could keep ourselves from getting so bogged down in minute semantics as to be unable to take action;
- what kind of baseline consensus would allow us to move forward while retaining the richness that comes from diversity of perspective and opinion.

Fundamental Questions

While many came into the roundtables with an expectation of producing a tidy list of specific recommendations and concrete action plans, we found that we spent a great deal of our time dealing with some basic -- and difficult -- questions:

- What do we **mean** when we say that we are moving into a new economy that is both "global" and "knowledge-based"?
- What do we **want** this new economy and society to look like?
- What are the dynamics in our current reality that are moving us toward our vision of the future?
- What are the dynamics that could be moving us toward our vision?

- What are the dynamics that are taking us in other directions?
- What new roles will have to be taken on by all the different players in our society as we move toward our vision: by individuals? by business? by unions? by not-for-profit organizations? by educators? by communities? by government?



How Far Have We Come

As a result, we found at the end of each roundtable that we all were experiencing conflicting feelings and perspectives as to how far we had come in our voyage. There was a sense of accomplishment in the strides we had taken toward building a shared vision of the future of the Alberta economy and developing a common vocabulary which would help us to move forward toward this vision. At the same time, there were varying degrees of frustration and disappointment that we hadn't had sufficient time to reach consensus on a series of concrete recommendations, and to create detailed action plans for implementing these recommendations.

The roundtable process itself brought home very vividly the reality that building a shared vision is a difficult task that involves open and honest communication, careful and sympathetic listening, and a great deal of time and energy. It is also an essential first step in creating the spirit of collaboration and cooperation that we are increasingly coming to recognize as the hallmark of the new world into which we are journeying. To a remarkable degree, the roundtable crews managed to achieve this spirit of learning and working together as a community.

A Continuing Journey

Where to From Here?

Each roundtable weekend was experienced as one leg in an ongoing journey. From each session, participants took away new information, insights, and suggestions to apply to their own efforts -- as individuals and in their organizations -- to bring about change. They took away new understandings of how others were approaching issues and problems, and a strong commitment to working in alliance and partnership with other individuals and organizations in the country and in the province.

> *It's very clear that in the history of our culture, we have a tendency to think in terms of solitudes. Government sector, private sector -- I think there is some notion that somehow they are qualitatively different. I think that for the economy to be successful in the future... that sort of distinction really has to be blurred. What we're talking about is really looking at ways to promote greater collaboration and cooperation among the sectors -- to bring them closer together -- so that we're seeing each of the players as having one part of the solution.*
>
> *Participant comment*

Working groups were formed out of several of the roundtables to continue to develop ideas put forward in the session, and the key results of each session were fed into subsequent sessions. Roundtable crew members are being kept up to date on the progress of the journey through periodic memos, and are receiving copies of the reports of all the roundtables as they reach draft form. They are invited to raise questions or contribute suggestions for additions and changes to these reports before the reports are released to the general public.

We had hoped to be able to bring together representatives from all the different crews, to collectively determine what the roundtable process would contribute to the Premier's Conference on the Economy in May. This has not proven feasible due to constraints both of time and of financing. Participants have been given an opportunity to read and react to this summary document, but a tight timeline has not permitted the luxury of long deliberations over precise wording of the ideas presented here. While we are satisfied that the report reflects the essence of the roundtable process and findings, we recognize that much useful further work could take place on refining the suggestions and translating them into concrete action plans.

Building Momentum

In the last few roundtables, participants were pushing both the project team and the entire crew to take a longer-term perspective, and to commit ourselves to finding ways of building on the momentum created by the roundtable process. As a model of the type of multi-stakeholder collaborative process that all of the roundtables have identified as being key to the prosperity of the province in the future, the crew has suggested that we need to capture what we have learned -- both content and process -- and use our learning to move us forward.

III THE RESULTS

> *The roundtables are about directions, not final answers. The poet Wallace Stevens said: "It is necessary in any originality to have the courage to be an amateur." In the task of engaging the new reality of an innovation-driven, knowledge-based global economy -- we are all amateurs taking our first uncertain steps into the future.*
>
> *Roundtable navigator*

Establishing Context

Background Papers

As part of our task of setting a shared context, the project team put together a package of background materials for each roundtable to send in advance to that roundtable's crew. For most of the sessions, this package included a brief paper in which we as the roundtable's "navigators" set out the key themes and issues that we saw emerging from the literature, as a point of departure for our discussions. For the final session, on relations among public and private sector management and labour, we relied instead on summary issues papers contributed by some of the participants.

Reporting Progress

The process of sorting through the results of the roundtables and attempting to capture their essence on paper is underway. We are currently reviewing tapes of breakout group and plenary sessions, reading supplementary material supplied by participants, and working at synthesizing a great deal of information into accessible 25-30 page reports. While the project staff writer is doing the initial drafting, the reporting is a participatory process. Working drafts are being screened and revised by the entire project team and by representatives of each session's crew before being circulated to the entire roundtable crew as a more formal draft, for additional comment and input.

Synthesis Reports

As synthesis documents, the reports necessarily oversimplify and generalize to a certain extent. They are intended both to reflect the range of ideas and suggestions explored in each roundtable, and to give a sense of the process by which the groups came to find common ground. The fact that an idea or a suggestion is recorded in the reports does not indicate any group consensus that it should be implemented; rather, it indicates the feeling of the group that productive change will come about through ongoing dialogue in which diverse viewpoints are respected and considered, and the potential of every idea and suggestion is thoroughly explored.

For a brief summary of each leg of the roundtable journey, see **Part II** of this document. These summaries are intended to give some sense of the context in which each of the roundtable discussions took place, to outline some of the ideas and suggestions that surfaced during the session, and to reflect the process by which each group came to establish some shared vocabulary and vision around the topic.

Emerging Themes

While we have not yet worked through the detailed reporting on each roundtable, we have seen a number of key themes emerge with remarkable consistency in every roundtable.

A Socio-Economic Revolution:

- We are living through a period of **fundamental socioeconomic change**. We are entering a new era and discovering a new world. As this fundamental change takes place, all of our institutions -- business, government, social, cultural and educational alike -- will be forced to rework structures, revise strategies, and rethink vision and goals.

- For years Canada has exploited its natural resources and its proximity to the large U.S. market to develop a society with the second or third highest standard of living in the world. Now, however, Canada is functioning within a **new "global" economy**, and **our ability to compete in this arena is being called into question**. We are finding that the economic "rules" by which we have governed our activities in the past are becoming less relevant.

- If we are to sustain and improve the quality of life for all Albertans in the future, we must **develop new abilities to create wealth** and **reduce deficits**. This is a critical issue, and not just for the corporate sector. Our health care and education systems, our social services, our arts and cultural activities all depend on the revenue obtained from the market sector.

Need for a "Culture Shift":

- Traditional linear frameworks and sectoral approaches are proving to be inadequate tools for dealing with the increasingly complex issues and problems that seem to characterize this new world. Our ability to sustain our quality of life in the future will therefore depend on our ability to create a **more interdisciplinary and holistic approach to economic activity** -- an approach that builds on a **dynamic collaboration** among business, government, labour, the education and scientific and social communities, cultural and not-for-profit organizations.

- In order to thrive in this new world, we may need to undergo a **"culture shift" or change in mindset** -- a change that allows us to move beyond our accepted assumptions about how the world works, to challenge

traditional beliefs and practices, to live with the ambiguity and paradox surrounding complex and multi-dimensional problems and issues, to entertain many different "answers" at once, and to use them to create innovative solutions and actions.

Need for New Language:

- Cooperation and collaboration depend on honest and clear communication, and on the sharing of an articulated vision and goals. But language is a human construct that always lags slightly behind the reality it attempts to reflect. At the core of our struggle to define a changing reality is the problem of **finding a shared language** that will allow us to move ahead to take the action that is required.

- We need **new images, new paradigms, new "mental maps"** and **new metaphors** to help us make sense of this new world and to begin to build a base for collaborative action.

Beyond Competitiveness:

- **"Competitiveness" is not an end goal**, but a means of **creating wealth** in order to **maintain and improve our "quality of life"** (recognizing that individual definitions of "quality of life" and "wealth" will vary). The new challenge of competitiveness is that it is no longer sufficient to concentrate on internal efficiencies (becoming "lean and mean"). Companies must increasingly learn to apply technology in an innovative manner, and to nurture high performance.

Sustainable Development:

- "Sustainable development" -- a way of thinking that enables us to **make progress on <u>both</u> the economy and the environment at the same time** -- should be the context for the province's development strategy.

- Progress does not necessarily mean growth in the traditional sense of the term. Whereas in the past we tended to emphasize the material indicators of our **"standard of living,"** we are shifting to an emphasis on more holistic and abstract **"quality of life"** indicators. We need to find **new ways of talking about and measuring "growth" and "success."**

Quality of Life:

- While we have suggested that maintaining and improving **"quality of life"** is a goal, in the new economy it can also be seen as a potential "driver" -- a **strategic asset** that actually creates **competitive advantage**. In a "knowledge-based society" in which information rather than raw resources is the organizing principle of production, companies have more latitude as to where they can locate their operations. Since the highly-educated knowledge workers on which companies depend are placing increasing emphasis on "quality of life" in their career decisions, companies are beginning to base location decisions on factors of physical, natural and cultural environment. The beautiful natural environment of this province and our superior social programs can attract industry, investment and tourism.

- Corporations are also finding that approaching **organizational change** through the perspective of "quality of life" issues can lead to unexpected and innovative strategies.

Diversity and Harmony:

- Our society as a whole is becoming more diverse as people from a greater variety of ethnic backgrounds choose to make Canada and Alberta their home. Our workforce is becoming more diverse as the participation of women and people from minority groups increases. While these realities are now becoming recognized and accepted, a great deal of emphasis has been placed on the problems -- perceived, real or potential -- that these changes present. Instead, we should be recognizing that there is a great deal of unrealized potential in Alberta that we can no longer afford to lose. **Learning to make the most effective use of the diverse skills and talents of our population** is no longer simply a moral or legal obligation; it **is an economic necessity**. We need to build a collective and inclusive vision for the future of Alberta that is based on the principle of **harmony in diversity**.

A Knowledge-Based Economy:

- We are now functioning in a **"knowledge-based" economy**, in which "information" has become both a lucrative product and an organizing principle of production. The knowledge-based economy gives us **new ways of looking at the worth of individuals**, as the knowledge, skills and talents of a society's people come to be recognized as the key to economic development. If competitive advantage is increasingly related to good ideas as much as to abundant raw materials, then companies have the **opportunity to create their own competitive advantage**. One of the biggest challenges of a knowledge-based society will be to put structures and systems in place that effectively use the great resource of **"intellectual capital"** that is available.

- We need to devote some energy to **defining the elements of a "knowledge-based economy,"** to **identifying the blockages** to the development of such an economy in Alberta, and **to identifying and supporting the individuals or institutions which can serve as a driver** to move us in this direction.

- We also need **new mechanisms for matching people with opportunities** in this "knowledge-based economy," at a time when high unemployment coexists with job vacancies in areas in which there is a skill shortage.

An Innovation-Driven Economy:

- The capacity to **innovate** will be the key to our success in this new world. **Innovation** in this context means more than research and development in the science and high technology areas. Innovation can happen on the shop floor, in management and marketing meetings, in the planning and implementation of social policy. Sometimes the most important innovation lies in the creation of **organizational and inter-organizational or social structures** that allow us to make the best use of the technological innovations we have developed.

- The main characteristics of innovation are **uncertainty, searching, exploring, taking risks** and **experimenting**. Much productive innovation is conceived at the "grassroots" level, but it needs a nurturing environment if it is to grow and develop. Many creative ideas may be stifled or killed in the "embryo" stage by a hostile -- or even just an indifferent -- environment.

- If we are to actively sponsor innovation, we need to define and analyze what our economy requires in terms of an **"infrastructure for innovation."** In the past, we have successfully built the infrastructure for a resource-based economy and for an industrial economy. What are the elements of infrastructure required for a global, knowledge-based economy?

Lifelong Learning:

- Collectively and individually, we need to pay more attention to **learning how to learn and how to change**, and to continual upgrading and development. We are moving away from dependence on our loyalty to an institution as a source of "job security," and toward increased **individual responsibility for maintaining the skills that will give us "employment security."**

- We need to reexamine our assumptions as to the **knowledge, skills and attitudes we will require for the future**, and the processes by which we can continually develop these skills. We need to move to an approach to "learning" that looks upon education and training as a **means to an end** rather than as an end, that is **not limited to a certain time of life or physical place**, that values **process** as well as content, that respects **abilities** as well as credentials, and that is **flexible and dynamic** rather than static.

- We have worked hard in this province to build a strong public education system. Now, however, we find that we are not producing a population with all of the appropriate knowledge and skills required to operate successfully in the new global economy. While the formal education system must not serve as a "scapegoat" for current problems, we have a sense that there is a gap between what the system is currently achieving and what we will need it to achieve in the new economy. We need to **consider the implications of the changes taking place in the world for our education system**. We need to **reexamine and clarify its mandate**. There may be a need for some fundamental reforms.

- Government, labour, management, and educators will need to form **new partnerships** and work together in new ways to initiate and to finance these changes. It may be useful to think of the **province of Alberta as a "learning organization."**

Strategic Alliances:

- We need to foster a **"pan-Alberta" attitude of alliances** geared to building new and shared visions and planning actions to move toward these visions -- alliances both within and across our traditional "sector"

divisions, including **partnerships and joint ventures between the "public" and the "private" sectors**.

- We need to **learn from success stories** in Canada and internationally as we seek new **collaborative decision-making structures** that bring labour and management together in full partnership to jointly address problems and plan strategy.

New Role for Government:

- In this new world, the role of government may be to **manage the process rather than the issues**. Government may move from playing the role of arbiter of values, to acting as a **facilitator** -- guiding the players through a process of change by providing information, outlining opportunities, developing supportive policies, and providing a forum in which the stakeholders can come together to plan and discuss. The new role of government may be to give **courage**, **confidence** and **opportunity** to community-based alliances.

- As citizens demand an increased role in decision-making, **local community governments may take on a new leadership role** -- as the level of government closest to the people and ideally most cognizant of the aspirations, values and attitudes of its constituents.

New Approaches to Public Services:

- Government is facing multi-faceted and sometimes conflicting public expectations relating to public services. As pressures on the government to meet new social and economic challenges in the changing economy increase, as resources dwindle, and as the formerly rigid distinctions between "public" and "private" become blurred, we should be looking for **innovative approaches to the design, delivery and financing of public services** -- approaches that involve **partnerships between the "public" and "private" sectors**.

- The role of **volunteer work** and of **"third sector"** or **not-for-profit organizations** may become increasingly important in this context.

New Policy Mechanisms:

- We need to create more mechanisms that allow **multi-stakeholder groups to work together with government** on the planning and implementation of public policy (building on such examples as the Clean Air Strategy for Alberta, the Alberta Roundtable on Environment and Economy, the Premier's Council on Science and Technology).

- We need to ensure that our **definition of "stakeholder" groups** includes those groups that have been marginalized or disenfranchised. Again, there may be an important role for **not-for-profit organizations** to play in **ensuring that all stakeholders are included in the debate**.

- The new strategy for economic development that comes out of the current "Toward 2000 Together" process should be what might be termed a **"people's paper on economic development"** rather than a strategy

designed solely by and for government. Diverse stakeholder groups should continue to work with government in some form of **cooperative or collaborative process** to develop a shared vision, guiding principles, and a plan of action for economic development in Alberta.

A Renewed Spirit of Citizenship:

- We need to revitalize a spirit of **"citizenship,"** recognizing that **responsibility and accountability** go hand in hand with rights, and encouraging the **transition from representative to participatory democracy**.

Public Awareness:

- As we move toward building a shared vision for the future of Alberta, we need to articulate a **clear and simple message** that will help individual Albertans internalize the meaning of all of these changes, and the impact on their lives. We then need to have messengers from all walks of life who are ready to champion this message.

- **Celebrating our success stories** will be an important aspect of public education.

- For collaboration and cooperation to happen, there is a need for a **mutual vision** and a **sense of shared responsibility** among all the players. Building relationships and trust takes **time and a commitment to open communication**. In a sense, what is needed is some of the spirit of pulling together to survive that a country gets in times of war or major disaster. Or perhaps it is better likened to the "pioneering spirit" that built this province. Can we recreate this spirit in a time of economic crisis?

- The process of building a shared vision and outlining collective action to move toward that vision has begun in Alberta through the "Toward 2000 Together" initiative. It will be important to **build on the momentum** that is being created in the province.

Moving Forward

> *We must be the change we wish to see in the world.*
>
> *Ghandi*

In each of the roundtables, the crew members as individuals or as groups put forward suggestions as to what concrete steps could be taken to build on the momentum and move forward. Many of their ideas were commitments to action at the individual and organizational levels. Others related to broader-based societal initiatives. In some cases, the suggestions involved strengthening or

expanding the influence of existing mechanisms; in others, participants were suggesting the need for new institutional structures that brought together diverse stakeholders in innovative ways. Some of these were well-developed ideas brought to the table by participants for the consideration of the group; others were initial notions created during weekend brainstorming sessions, and in some instances developed further by participant groups after the roundtable session.

These ideas have been recorded in the reports and the roundtable summaries in **Part II**. Again, they are not put forward as firm recommendations on which group consensus was achieved. Rather, their intent is to start bringing individuals and organizations together around ideas which they find interesting, in an attempt to push toward concrete action.

> *I think these are good ideas. I keep on asking myself, who's going to start it?*
>
> ***Participant comment***

Need for New Mechanisms

Some examples of the types of broad-based or inter-organizational mechanisms that were discussed (not a comprehensive list):

- a public awareness campaign, modelled on the "PARTICIPACTION" and "IMAGINE" initiatives, designed to help Albertans internalize the impact of global changes on their lives and spur innovative action (raised in Fort McMurray and all subsequent roundtables);
- a provincial economic/technology alliance to link with a similar alliance evolving nationally (raised in Fort McMurray);
- a proposal to establish an "Institute for Innovation Management" -- not a "bricks and mortar" structure, but rather an international network organization (raised in Fort McMurray);
- a "Centre for Privatization" with a mandate to collect models and examples from around the world of innovative public/private cooperation in the delivery and financing of public services, and to dispense this information in a useful manner (raised in Lethbridge);
- an "Alberta Foundation for Social and Economic Development," formed as a private/public financial alliance empowered by government to rationalize priorities for social and economic sector financing, to stimulate innovative thinking, and to fund experiments in producing viable new approaches (raised in Lethbridge);
- a major, multi-sectoral commission (with a one-year time limit) empowered to deliver more efficient public services, based on public/private sector partnerships (raised in Lethbridge);

- a multi-stakeholder Sustainable Development Commission (two-year time limit), empowered to take the vision of the Alberta Round Table on Environment and Economy further and to recommend changes (to legislation, regulations, incentives, programs) in light of the principles of sustainable development (raised in Medicine Hat);

- a multi-stakeholder group to work with all of the input of the "Towards 2000 Together" initiative and draft a White Paper on the Economy (raised in Medicine Hat);

- "Innovative Business Enterprises" (based on the model developed by the Canadian Institute for Advanced Research) designed to put research and development together with patient capital and management and marketing expertise, to take innovative ideas to the "commercialization" stage (raised in Calgary);

- an "Innovation Network," co-funded by the public and the private sectors, to provide leadership in marshalling and co-ordinating the existing resources of educational institutions, business, labour and government to compete successfully in a knowledge-based economy (raised in Calgary);

- a "Centre of Excellence" (not necessarily a physical structure, but a collectivity of expertise) building on the work that Alberta has already done in the area of multiculturalism, and devoted to issues of valuing and working with diversity (raised in Grande Prairie);

- a continuation of the "roundtable" model, pulling in a broader range of stakeholder group participation (raised in Grande Prairie);

- a "Business Plan Development Consulting Assistance Corporation" that would help entrepreneurs shape their ideas into a viable business and obtain financing (raised in Edmonton);

- a multi-stakeholder group to work on the creation of a "Human Resource Development" strategy for Alberta -- a strategy that looks at new ways of learning and creates an ongoing process for HRD planning, rather than defining a fixed plan based on current needs and realities (raised in Red Deer);

- a series of pilot projects in which government acts as a facilitator (as necessary), bringing together labour and management to address a range of issues and problems (raised in Red Deer, where the first pilot project, involving health and safety issues in the meat industry, was planned).

Resource Materials

A range of public education needs and multi-sectoral joint initiatives were discussed at the roundtable sessions. To support the public awareness process and to help build understanding about the need for collaboration, it was suggested that much of the material coming out of the roundtables and the "Toward 2000" process as a whole might usefully be packaged as learning materials to serve a variety of audiences and needs.

PART II

EXCERPTS FROM THE JOURNEY'S LOG

Roundtable #1

"Towards an Innovation-Driven Economy"

Fort McMurray, November 22-24

Setting the Stage

The Fort McMurray roundtable set the stage for the six subsequent roundtables by

- exploring the variety of global changes that are combining to create a "new world" and a "new economy"; and
- putting forward the suggestion that Albertans need to begin a collective journey "towards an innovation-driven economy" if we are to thrive in the future.

Understanding Global Change

Two speakers launched this first leg of the roundtable journey by sharing their understandings of the factors and forces driving the changes currently taking place in the world, and the specific impact of these changes on Alberta. Don Simpson, Director and Vice-President of the Banff Centre for Management, opened the roundtable by suggesting that although it has become a truism that we live in a world characterized by rapid and fundamental change, most of us are confused about what exactly is causing this change, and slow to fully internalize its implications for the way we live and do business. We are finding it difficult to come to grips with the reality that Canada as a whole has attained its current wealth by competing successfully in a game of world trade -- but that the game which we have mastered is for the most part no longer being played.

> *Canada is faced with a mountain of debt, a chronic current account deficit, a devalued dollar, a sharp fall in demand for resource-based exports, a declining share of world markets and a proportion of manufactured to total exports that ranks us behind India and Brazil.*
>
> *William Saywell and Allyn R. Taylor, The Task Force on International Business Education Progress Report*

For years, Canada has exploited its natural resources and its proximity to the large U.S. market to develop a society with the second or third highest standard of living in the world. Now, however, Canada is functioning within a new "global" economy, and our ability to compete in this arena is being called into question. We are already seeing a decline in our economic prosperity

-- a decline that is accompanied by rising social and political discontent. We find ourselves in the position of needing to determine what game we are now playing, to understand the rules of this new game, to develop the strategies and skills that will allow us to compete, to get ourselves in condition to play the game energetically and enthusiastically, and to learn to play as a team.

A "New Economy"

Research work currently being carried out by the consulting firm of Nuala Beck and Associates suggests that we are living through a "major evolutionary shift" in our economy -- a shift analogous to the one that took place sometime in the early twentieth century, as economic growth ceased to stem primarily from commodity processing and became more closely linked to manufacturing. The firm's researchers claim that economic growth in North America is now being driven primarily by the "four engines" of computers and semiconductors, instrumentation, health and medical, communications and telecommunications. The challenge put forth by economist Nuala Beck in her keynote address to the roundtable group ("Alberta's New Economy") was that we are making important decisions about the future of the Alberta economy using an "old paradigm" or set of assumptions which has become -- not irrelevant -- but incomplete.

People once measured economic growth in terms of pig iron production and cotton consumption. We are now more likely to look at industrial production, housing starts, and auto sales. But housing, according to Ms Beck's research, now accounts for only 4% of GNP in Canada, whereas the health and medical sector accounts for 10%. Should we not be tracking "medical starts" as a key economic indicator? Do our current indicators in fact measure growth in the sectors that are now driving our economy?

Beyond "Either/Or"

The study does not claim that the "old economy" sectors or indicators no longer matter, but rather that these are not the sectors to which we should be looking to drive immediate economic growth. The suggestion is that these sectors have grown rapidly in the past, and have reached the peak of their growth. Many are going or have gone through a period of decline; those that have survived a major decline are now in a "trough" of stability. If they are to grow again, they will need to create new products or new uses for old products, design innovative new processes that allow them to do things better or at lower cost, or find new markets (many are looking to Eastern Europe in this connection).

Throughout the roundtable process, we looked to this kind of provocative input from participants or from background readings to help all of us recognize our deeply-held assumptions about the "way the world is" and break out of old patterns of thought. None of the "models" or patterns we explored were meant to enclose and limit our thinking -- nor to represent a single "new paradigm" that effectively destroys and replaces the old. Instead, we constantly challenged ourselves and each other to move beyond an "either/or" mindset, and to contemplate the ambiguity and paradox surrounding complex and multi-dimensional problems and issues. We found that many of the boundaries and categories that we have traditionally used to make sense of the world are beginning to break down.

> *The industrial era told us that there was one right answer. The information era tells us that there are many different options, all of which can work as long as we understand them sufficiently.*
>
> *Participant comment*

For example, we discussed how misleading the simple statement that we are moving from a "goods-based" economy to a "service-based" economy can be. The computer industry may be an engine of growth in the new economy, but many of the activities of this "engine" are in fact driven by industries such as the oil and gas industry. The "health and medical" industry may be growing faster than the metal-producing industries, but the former industry relies heavily on the latter for materials for buildings and equipment. It may be that our old separation between "goods" and "services" is no longer useful -- that the two "categories" of economic activity are becoming so closely integrated that it is now difficult to tell which is which.

Similarly, participants suggested that we may need to reshape some of our current thinking about "wealth creation" and "wealth consumption." We now find ourselves faced with statistics indicating that the "health and medical" sector accounts for 10% of our GNP. Is this a cause for concern or for celebration? If we believe that the health sector is entirely a "wealth consuming" sector, funded by the surplus turned out by other "wealth creating" sectors, then the 10% may well be a disastrous figure. Are there ways, however, in which the sector can create wealth? What about the new technologies, products and processes that it develops? And looking down the road, can we perhaps see the possibility of exporting for profit our knowledge and skills in this area to potentially huge markets in countries that are now "developing"?

A Broad Definition of "Innovation"

The background paper for the Fort McMurray roundtable suggested that competitive advantage for Canada in the new world trade game will depend less on the exploitation of our physical capital, and more on the innovative application of intellectual capital. It is this kind of innovative "upside-down thinking" that will be required. When we hear the word "innovation," we tend to think of research and development in the scientific and high technology areas. While the word "innovation" sometimes refers to major breakthroughs that lead to entirely new ways of doing things or of thinking about the world, some of the assumptions behind its use throughout the roundtable process are

- that there is also great value in the less glamorous innovations -- the improvisations and improvements that are constantly being created and implemented;
- that while "innovation" often means the physical development of new products, it can also mean the development of new processes that allow us to produce existing products more efficiently;

- that "innovation" can also refer to the creation of a new context that affects the way we do business. Even some of the more "high tech" innovations are made possible by "social" innovations -- innovations related to organizational structure or the design of jobs.

In the past, social innovations such as pensions, mortgages, and insurance have had a major impact on the way we live and do business. In our time, we have seen the effect of innovations such as new tax laws, the creation of enterprise zones, or the implementation of quality circles. Will a major social innovation -- or sequence of smaller social innovations -- drive the product and process innovations that will give us a comparative advantage in the new global economy?

> *My sense is that we're struggling with a gap between technological innovation and social innovation.*
>
> *Roundtable navigator*

What kind of innovation will lead to increased productivity, enhanced competitiveness, and a more efficient use of resources? How do we use human resources as a generator of creativity and innovation? What initial steps can we take toward creating an "innovation-driven economy" in Alberta?

Principles of an "Innovation-Driven Economy"

A number of general principles emerged as we begin to discuss these broad themes:

- Although we talk of enhancing "competitiveness," improving our ability to compete with others is not our end goal, but one possible means to an end. Our "competitiveness" in the world market directly affects our capacity to "create wealth" in the domestic market -- which in turn directly affects our "quality of life." Our health care and education systems, our social services, our arts and cultural activities all depend on the revenue obtained from the income of the market sector.

- Improved "quality of life" for all Albertans is a major goal of our economic endeavours. Can "quality of life" also be seen as a potential "driver" -- a strategic asset that actually creates competitive advantage?

- Innovation is not necessarily something that can be legislated or imposed from the top down. Much productive innovation is conceived at the "grassroots" level, but it needs a nurturing environment if it is to grow and develop. Many creative ideas may be stifled or killed in the "embryo" stage by a hostile -- or even just an indifferent -- environment.

Initiating and Sponsoring Innovationn

How do we initiate and sponsor innovation at the grassroots level in Alberta? The Fort McMurray crew mapped out a number of general directions for subsequent roundtable crews to explore:

- **Building Future Potential:** We talked of the importance of beginning with our children, and overcoming our society's tendency to encourage mediocrity. While some of our discussion focused on the formal education system, we had broader concerns about our society's attitudes towards learning, and our ability to recognize and reward innovation.

- **Lifelong Learning:** While we need to be nurturing an "innovation lifestyle" in our children, we can't as a society afford to wait until they grow up. We must establish a culture of life-long learning for innovation. While our learning needs to be practical and action-oriented, it must also foster the more abstract attitudinal changes that are increasingly becoming essential: the ability to recognize opportunity when it appears in unexpected places and unorthodox forms, the ability to tap into intuitive resources as well as logic-based resources, the ability to function productively in the midst of paradox and uncertainty, the ability to transcend rigid frameworks and paradigms. Our learning at all levels must include some exposure to what is happening outside of our own environment. We must visit other countries and operations, take a look at initiatives in other provinces, and open our minds to the range of approaches and practices found in the rest of the world.

- **Overcoming Fear:** We need to recognize a widespread resistance to and fear of change, explore the reasons for it, and find ways of removing this barrier to innovation. We also noted that in an innovation-driven economy -- in which, we conjecture, organizations may become flatter, job descriptions increasingly blurred, networks and strategic alliances more the norm than the exception, and change a reality to be lived with daily rather than feared in the future -- many of our traditional expectations concerning career patterns will be turned on their heads. What kind of systems do we need to put in place to create a level of security in the new economic environment? At the simplest level, we need to ensure that pensions are portable, and that counselling and retraining are readily available. Can we do more?

- **Creating Strategic Alliances:** We have a sense that we don't yet entirely understand the full potential of strategic alliances, nor how to go about conceiving, developing and putting them into action. There are now groups in Alberta actively exploring ways of creating alliances between, for example, industry associations and research groups. Several potential models for cooperation, all in the initial concept stage, were put before the group over the course of the weekend for discussion and further development.

- **Building the Infrastructure for Innovation:** If we are to actively sponsor innovation, we need to take a more in-depth look at what our economy requires in terms of "infrastructure for innovation." The infrastructure might range from business incubators for "embryo" ideas, to new non-confrontational approaches to collective bargaining. We noted that public sector investment in transportation infrastructure has been a crucial factor in our economic prosperity in the past, and suggested that as we move into an "information era," we may now need public sector investment in information and technology transfer infrastructure -- in electronic "data highways" as well as physical vehicle highways. We discussed the need for new kinds of financial infrastructure: "patient capital" to support innovative ideas that require longer-term research and development; a tax system that explicitly supports activity designed to increase our ability to create wealth in the new economy; new inter-organizational linkages that allow us to match ideas and management expertise with financial resources.

The Message and the Messengers

Running through all of these discussions was a sense of a great need for

- more communication
- more public awareness of the issues
- more sharing of experience and information
- cooperation based on open and frank dialogue across disciplines, sectors, and stakeholder groups
- new methods of developing consensus
- a new "game plan" shaped by all Albertans.

A very clear consensus emerged at the end of this first "trial voyage" weekend that there was an urgent need to get all Albertans to "sign up" for the much longer and more difficult journey "towards an innovation-driven economy." Recognizing that people will be reluctant to join with us on the journey unless they have some sense of why it is necessary, what direction it will take, and what their role will be, the group identified a need to articulate a clear and simple message.

> *The innovator makes enemies of all those who prospered under the old order, and only lukewarm support is forthcoming from those who would prosper under the new. Their support is lukewarm partly from fear of their adversaries, who have the existing laws on their side, and partly because men are generally incredulous, never really trusting new things unless they have tested them by experience.*
>
> *From Niccolo Machiavelli, The Prince, 1513*

While we felt that many of the elements of the message had been discussed over the course of the weekend, it must be refined and couched in vivid terms that "hit home" with individuals in this province. We thought of "PARTICIPACTION" and the more recent "IMAGINE" campaigns as models of broad-based, multi-sectoral initiatives that have successfully communicated complex ideas.

For this type of collaboration and cooperation to happen, there is a need for a mutual vision and a sense of shared responsibility among all the players. The experience of the roundtable weekend reinforced our sense that building relationships and trust takes time and a commitment to open communication. Somewhat ironically, we suggested that what is needed is some of the spirit of pulling together to survive that a country gets in times of war or major disaster. How do we recreate this spirit in a time of economic crisis?

We need to have messengers from all walks of life who are ready to champion this message. Because prosperity is a non-partisan issue, we need to involve all political parties. While

government may be able to "kick start" the process by packaging a clearly-articulated economic and social program (as indeed it has begun to do through the "Toward 2000 Together" initiative), the move from policy to implementation will be predicated on a "buy in" by all our private sector, educational, financial, cultural and not-for-profit institutions. We need to foster a "pan-Alberta" attitude of alliances geared to building a shared vision and to taking action toward this vision.

Roundtable #2

"The Creative Financing and Delivery of Public Services:

Searching for New Opportunities for Public/Private Partnerships"

Lethbridge, January 17-19

Seeing Problems as Opportunities

As we consider the future of the Alberta economy, we find ourselves facing uncertainty as to whether we will be able to sustain the high quality social and physical environments to which we have become accustomed. It is becoming increasingly clear that we are living beyond our means: deep concern about current levels of taxation now co-exists with anxiety over deficit budgets and the size of the national debt. According to some, it is equally clear that there are only two possible solutions -- either to raise taxes or to cut programs. Are these truly our only alternatives? The challenge facing the group that gathered in Lethbridge for the second leg of the roundtable journey was to look beyond this doom-and-gloom scenario -- and to view the problem as an opportunity that will ultimately allow us to find innovative ways of designing, financing, and delivering public services.

While most of the participants brought to the table strong convictions concerning the role of the state and the role of the free market system, we agreed that the roundtable was not a forum for an ideological either/or debate. The focus was not on determining what governments in general "should" or "should not" be doing in an ideal world, nor was it on arguing over what governments (or, alternatively, the private sector) inherently "could" or "could not" do well. Rather, the context for the roundtable discussion was that as we move through a period of fundamental change, all of our institutions -- business, government, social and educational alike -- will be forced to rework structures, revise strategies, and rethink vision and goals.

> *The question is not, "Are you for or against privatization?" The question is, "What are the most pressing problems, and are there ways in which the public can benefit from using the private sector?"*
>
> *Roger Feldman, "Public-Private Partnerships for Infrastructure Finance"*

The underlying assumption was that governments will need increased flexibility and resources to take on the new social and economic challenges of the future. The goal of our journey was to consider the potential role for creative public/private partnerships, and to suggest specific ways in which the sectors could work together to finance and deliver services that we now think of as "public". We considered these questions from the perspective of the wide range of activities in which the public sector is currently a key player: the building of basic infrastructure, transportation systems, health care, education, social welfare, municipal services, and so on.

While our focus was on provincial level public sector activities, we also recognized the interdependence of federal, provincial and local initiatives. Our emphasis was on finding innovative options, and on beginning to articulate these options clearly.

Encountering Paradox

The Lethbridge crew began its exploration fully cognizant that it might take a great deal of creative or "lateral" thinking to break us out of what appears to be a "catch-22" situation, in which two contradictory courses of action seem to be indicated. As our economy goes through a period of recession and of restructuring, people are demanding more and improved public services. At the same time, the group noted that the revenue sources on which the government has depended -- particularly royalties -- continue to decline, and there is a general perception that the public is not prepared to pay more taxes. More taxes and an increasing public debt cut into corporate profits and undermine the competitiveness of our industries, which in turn undermines our capacity to create the wealth required to support these services in the future. Some people are suggesting that we must sacrifice some of the existing public services in the name of competitiveness; at the same time, others suggest that our high quality public services have created a trained and healthy work force and an attractive environment in which to live and work, and can therefore be seen as contributing to our competitive advantage.

Some analysts are warning us that our ratio of public sector employees to industrial sector employees is getting dangerously high, and that if we continue with "business as usual" we may find ourselves sliding into "developing country" status in the near future. Participants suggested that we are living through a period in which public expectations of government are high, yet public confidence in government is low. People are increasingly cynical about government, yet they are looking to government for leadership in hard times.

In the context of this complex and paradoxical current reality, we acknowledged that the government is facing multi-faceted and sometimes conflicting public expectations. As individual citizens, we all have a tendency to recognize the need to reduce government spending, but not at the expense of the services and programs that we think are most important. We seem to have developed a habit of going to government first; we don't even consider how we might meet needs through private enterprise or cooperative work. We recognize that this may have to change as pressures on the government to meet new social and economic challenges increase and resources dwindle.

> *One of the things we said early on was that we were not trying to make the argument just that government has to get out of some of the public services because it can't afford to deliver them. We were looking to an innovation-driven economy in the future where government is going to be pressed to develop some new infrastructure. How does it reshape its present obligations in the delivery of public services in order to have the flexibility to be creative in building a new infrastructure?*
>
> ***Roundtable navigator***

We found throughout the weekend that our notions of what constitutes the "private" sector and what constitutes the "public" sector were becoming blurred. We found ourselves moving beyond the assumption that the ability to be "competitive" and "entrepreneurial" belongs exclusively to the private sector. If it is useful for the private sector to become a player in that portion of the economy that has been run by the public sector, and to compete for contracts on an efficiency/cost effective delivery basis, then we should consider whether the reverse is true as well. We also found that it was impossible to talk about the delivery of public services without considering the significant role of volunteer work and "third sector" or not-for-profit organizations in this area.

Articulating a Vision

We began to articulate a vision of the future financing and delivery of "public" services that was based on a true partnership between the public and private sectors. In its details, the vision is still fuzzy and needs more definition. In its main outline, however, several points became clear:

- For the partnership to be effective, it must operate in an atmosphere of openness, mutual respect and trust, and cooperation.
- It must operate against a backdrop of a set of shared values -- values which become the reference point for ongoing decision-making.
- In the process of establishing these values, it will be important to balance profit considerations with issues of public access to high-quality services.
- The partnership must foster productivity, competitiveness and cost-efficiency in the delivery of services. It must encourage entrepreneurial and innovative activity.
- The partnership must be client-oriented and accountable (the definition of roles and accountability may be an evolving process).
- It must be sensitive to the human factor, recognizing that in any process of change people's lives are going to be affected, and making every effort to minimize stress and disruption. It must include mechanisms for helping to ensure that people's skills and knowledge are effectively applied in areas in which they can make a contribution.

- It should also recognize that skilled volunteers are a rich human resource, and plan to make effective use of all available skills.

- Most important, we must recognize that this partnership needs to be allowed to grow and change and develop -- that it will be an organic and living process, rather than a fixed or static structure.

Defining Implementation Principles

Part of our process of determining potential first steps toward further defining our vision, and then taking action towards realizing our vision, was to start to clarify some implementation principles. We shared stories about what has actually been happening recently as the Government of Alberta moves to privatize or "contract out" some of the services formerly delivered by the public sector. Some of these stories were encouraging examples of how consultation and cooperative planning has allowed change to take place with the least possible disruption and stress for those most affected. Others were nightmares of miscommunication, poor management, and a legacy of bad feelings. Out of these stories, emerged a few clear implementation principles:

- "Contracting out" does not mean that the public sector gives up accountability for the effective delivery of services. The ongoing management and close monitoring of contracts is key.

- In our attempts to deal with pressing financial problems, we must not lose sight of the needs and rights of the people who have been performing public service jobs effectively for many years. If changes to private sector management are to take place, current public employees should be offered the chance to retain their jobs under the new system.

- The first step in looking for innovative ways of reducing costs should be honest and open discussion between management and labour.

- We all fear and resist change, but we fear it most when we feel that the change is being imposed by someone else and we are being kept in the dark. For change to happen effectively, those who will be affected by it need lots of advance notice. They need to have information volunteered to them by those proposing the change. They need to be consulted as to how the needed change can best take place, and they need to know that this consultation process is real -- that their input is truly going to make a difference. This consultation process will be most useful if there is a pre-existing relationship among the parties that is characterized by trust and mutual respect.

- Retraining opportunities must be in place for workers who will need to acquire new knowledge and skills -- or new applications for existing knowledge and skills -- to make a contribution in a changing economy.

Brainstorming Options

A number of specific suggestions and models were put on the table -- some very preliminary and tentative, others more developed. We considered, for example, the following:

- **A re-examination of the principles of "universality" and a reconsideration of a "user-pay" system:** It is important that this be an open dialogue that takes a thorough and realistic look at the needs and concerns of all stakeholders.

- **Opportunities for turning public "services" into engines of growth:** Having considered a number of success stories in this area, we began to look for other opportunities. We saw one potential opportunity growing out of the vast amount of information that the public sector collects and analyses. We also saw opportunities for an expansion of the global range of Alberta companies, through partnerships with government.

- **Building the infrastructure for increased public/private cooperation:** In this area, we discussed the formalization of public/private "rotation" or exchange programs at the executive and management levels, designed to foster in public and private sector management a shared understanding of opportunities and constraints inherent in each sector. We suggested that some very simple social infrastructure changes -- such as increased portability of pension plans -- would have considerable impact on people's acceptance of change.

- **Costing of public services:** One pre-requisite for increased public/private cooperation in the financing and delivery of public services would seem to be a more sophisticated understanding of the full cost of public services. The suggestion was made that we might need to develop new costing methods for tracking costs that may now be hidden.

- **New opportunities for financing:** Among the suggestions put forward for further consideration: the possibility of sharing capital equipment between private enterprise and educational institutions; the U.S. example of municipal bonds to provide more flexibility at the local level; the financing model by which the private sector provides financing for a major infrastructure project, operates it for a set number of years, and then turns it over to the public sector. We took an in-depth look at some examples of the range of financing models that have been used for transportation infrastructure, and considered the idea of selling equity in existing highways as a productive source of financing for new transportation infrastructure.

Moving Forward

A variety of mechanisms were suggested for formalizing the information-sharing and dialogue that will be crucial for exploring these and other ideas further. One group suggested the establishment of a "Centre for Privatization" with a mandate to collect models and examples from across Canada and around the world, and to dispense this information in a useful manner. One of its activities would be to work with the media to ensure that success stories illustrating creative public/private partnerships be publicized and available as models for future change.

One individual put forward a suggestion that an "Alberta Foundation for Social and Economic Development" be formed as "a major new private/public financial alliance empowered by government to rationalize priorities for social and economic sector financing, to stimulate innovative thinking, and to fund experiments in producing viable new approaches."

> *In my view there is a compelling need for a government funding mechanism to provide seed money for private sector, non-profit initiatives in innovative approaches to emerging areas of social, educational, environmental, health and cultural needs.*
>
> *Participant comment*

The group's deliberations over the course of the weekend made us clearly face the reality that there was a need for major change, and for a specific strategy to bring these changes about. The current dynamics of change are giving us an opportunity to step back and look at the larger picture in a holistic and realistic manner, as the very fact of this roundtable -- as a forum that allowed government, labour and private sector management to explore these issues together -- indicates. But the roundtable could be only one small stage in a much longer journey. It only highlighted the need for a regular forum for these groups to sit down and talk. Whatever may have been the attitude of any of these groups toward such cooperative effort in the past, there is now some consensus that the time is ripe for this kind of multi-sectoral initiative.

A subgroup of the roundtable therefore proposed

> *the formation of a major, multi-sector commission empowered to deliver more efficient public services, based on public/private sector partnerships.*

The commission would have a professional staff, but would be run by the commission members. **It would have a one-year time limit.** The subgroup making this proposal also agreed to continue to meet to flesh the idea further, and to feed the results of their work back into future roundtables.

Roundtable #3

"The Greening of Alberta Business:

Competitive Disadvantage or Commercial Advantage?"

Medicine Hat, January 31 - February 2

A Shift in Perspective

The issue of the relationship between economic development and environmental concerns was raised in every roundtable session. In Medicine Hat, we focused specifically on the challenge of making a fundamental shift in the way we think about incorporating environmental principles into economic activity.

The assumption underlying the Medicine Hat roundtable was that, on the whole, North American companies tend to treat their responses to increasing public pressure to "go green" primarily as a bottom line cost of doing business. If we shift our perspective, as many German and Scandinavian companies have done, then perhaps we can look at public concern about sustainable development as an opportunity to create new strategies for competitive advantage -- rather than as a costly problem. Perhaps we can benefit from the experience of an increasing number of firms worldwide that have found that time and money invested in addressing environmental issues has sometimes yielded unexpected side benefits: reduced raw material and energy inputs, reduced waste and lower operational costs, lucrative new products or processes to market, improved management models and practices, an increasing sense of collaboration among employees with a shared vision and common goals, a positive public image. Perhaps we can treat the beautiful natural environment of this province -- with its potential to attract industry, investment and tourism -- as a strategic asset that it is in our best interest to protect and enhance.

An Ongoing Process

The organizers of the Medicine Hat roundtable were very conscious of entering a process that has been ongoing in Alberta for some time. We chose to build on the work of the Alberta Round Table on Environment and Economy (ARTEE), which has devoted considerable thought and effort since May of 1990 to exploring the broad relationships between environmental concerns and economic development. ARTEE's October 1991 statement of vision, guiding principles, and steps to realizing a sustainable future served as a point of departure for the discussions at this roundtable.

> *Alberta, a member of the global community, is a leader in sustainable development, ensuring a healthy environment, a healthy economy, and a high quality of life in the present and the future.*
>
> *"Our Vision for Alberta," The Alberta Round Table on Environment and Economy*

Our hope is that the two roundtable processes will be mutually reinforcing.

Defining "Sustainable Development"

The presence of some of the ARTEE members in our roundtable crew also helped us sort through some of the confusion surrounding the phrase "sustainable development," which apparently has over 600 documented definitions. ARTEE has chosen to define "sustainable development" as

> *a way of thinking that enables us to make progress on both the economy and the environment at the same time.*

As such, it is not a code word for "environment," nor is it an excuse for "business as usual." It begins to shift our thinking from an image of a "balance" in which there are trade-offs between economic and environmental concerns, to an image of environment and economy as two sides of the same coin. While realistically we will probably continue in the short-run to do some things that make economic sense but not environmental sense, and vice versa, we should simultaneously be working to put the "whole" back together again. In sustainable development, something makes sense only if it makes both environmental and economic sense.

Because there are so many definitions of sustainable development, it has become one of those overarching concepts that is inclusive rather than exclusive. We thought that the concept of "freedom" might be a helpful analogy here. There's no one definition of what freedom is, yet it's a very powerful context that directs people's actions. And it is something that people have been able to rally around as eliciting an emotional response that has meaning to them. Many of us think that sustainable development can have this kind of inclusive rallying power.

At the same time, we note the reservations that some individuals and environmental advocacy groups have about the concept. They continue to challenge us to look beyond "sustainable development" -- which they see as a minimum goal -- to a more fundamental change in our attitudes to growth. In choosing to build on ARTEE's work and to phrase the topic for this third roundtable as we have, the roundtable organizers made the assumption that the world as a whole will continue for some time to operate according to some of the principles associated with what has been called the "expansionist" paradigm -- a set of assumptions in which material economic growth is a core value and the natural environment is a resource fuelling this growth. Many will argue that what is required is a more fundamental shift, a movement toward the deeper ecological world view that in the "web of life" all organisms and entities in the ecosphere have intrinsic and equal value, and that the human world has no right to exploit the non-human world in the interests of its own growth.

These issues are part of a wider philosophical debate about the nature of the world and our place in it that has been ongoing since the beginning of human history. It is an important debate, and one that is becoming more urgent as the extent of the damage already done to the planet is recognized. The thoughts and suggestions that each of us brought to the table were influenced by our own exploration of these questions. We chose, however, not to make the philosophical debate the focus of the roundtable.

Narrowing the Scope

The Medicine Hat roundtable took place in the context of a series of roundtables on the Alberta economy designed to offer practical suggestions for immediate and long-term action in the public and private sectors. Most of us expect that for the near future, we as a country and as a province will continue to seek economic growth -- though not necessarily the type of growth we have sought in the past.

For this reason, the organizers consciously narrowed the scope of the roundtable discussion to focus on the environmental challenge facing Alberta companies as they struggle to thrive in the new global economy. In an atmosphere of increasing government regulation and public pressure, companies are being forced to make some major adjustments to the way they do business, in order to minimize the harmful effects of their activities on the environment.

Some argue that while these adjustments may be morally defensible and important in the long-term, if companies are forced to make these adjustments too quickly they will almost certainly lose their competitiveness and their ability to survive in a global economy. Others would question this assumption, suggesting that in many businesses the ability to make these adjustments in an innovative manner will not only not hinder a company's competitiveness, but will actually add value and may assist the company in its efforts to be globally competitive.

> *I really like the theme of innovation, because when you really think about it, the only way you can make progress on two apparently conflicting objectives at the same time is creative new ideas -- is innovation. To do just a tradeoff between economic development and environment is just a matter of calculation -- there's no imagination there, but to actually progress on both at the same time takes real innovation.*
>
> *Participant comment*

Redefining "Growth"

While we said that the roundtable would not focus on a philosophical "growth/no growth" discussion, participants suggested that one of the innovative things that is happening in this "new world" is that instead of arguing these polarized positions, people are beginning to redefine what is meant by "growth" and "progress," and to look for more appropriate ways of measuring success.

We are seeing the beginnings of a shift in focus from "extracting wealth" to "creating wealth" through knowledge-based economic activities. We suggested that when people talk of "limits to growth," they are generally concerned with the strain we are putting on the earth by consuming natural resources and generating waste. We do need to cap some kinds of economic activities, but we will continue to grow through our creative potential and through the generation of knowledge.

> *Think about the communications industry, and how much economic value is being generated in the communications going on between people in the new telecommunications systems -- now using a few pounds of sand where it used to take tons of copper.*
>
> *Participant comment*

We are also seeing the beginnings of a shift in consumer attitudes from the consumption of goods to the consumption of services and experiences. Whereas in the past we tended to emphasize the material indicators of our "standard of living," we now hear more about more holistic and abstract "quality of life" indicators. Businesses that can anticipate and recognize the implications of these market trends can also reposition themselves to benefit from them.

Approaches and Opportunities

In our exploration of approaches and opportunities that will enable Alberta to make progress on both the economy and the environment at the same time, we discussed

- **The need to re-examine Alberta's legislative and regulatory environment in light of a vision of sustainable development:** Programs and policies that may be highly appropriate at a certain time may be inappropriate or even harmful at another time. Too often, no time limits or sunset clauses are designed into these programs, and we fail to revisit and redesign them as circumstances change. Some felt that we should be redesigning the taxation system so that it is specifically geared to discouraging harmful activities -- "taxing waste rather than wealth" -- and to supporting such things as research and development in environmental industries.

  There seemed to be some consensus that in our progression toward sustainable development, government efforts should focus on harnessing market forces rather than on attempting to "command" or "control" the economy. The suggestion was made that the government should not be in the business of trying to pick "winners" and "losers." We should try instead to put in place a system of incentives which are generally available and responsive to market forces.

- **"If you build it, people will come."**: We appropriated this phrase from the movie *Field of Dreams* to remind ourselves that the innovation that will be required to achieve our goal of sustainable development comes from people, and people will be drawn to an attractive environment that encourages entrepreneurial activity. We need to recognize the great advantages that Alberta already has in this context, and make a conscious effort to maintain both the attractiveness of the environment and the supports for entrepreneurial activity.

- **Building on strengths:** One strategy for making progress on the economy and the environment at the same time is to shift our emphasis from resource extraction activities to activities that involve the application of knowledge as the "value added." There is a great deal of technological expertise in the province, much of it specifically related to environmental management. We felt that there would potentially be a huge global market for our expertise in managing energy, land, water and air for maximum efficiency, and in treating waste and waste water. We talked of the potential to build on our strengths in clean coal technology, biotechnology, and natural gas.

- **The need for education -- of all kinds**: Real understanding of the issues involved in sustainable development is a prerequisite for the general population becoming "empowered" to make progress on these goals. Celebration of success stories is key. Since lack of financial capital to support the design and development of new, environmentally-responsible technologies, processes and products is a major constraint, there is a need for a public education process that encourages individuals to make long-term investments in these areas, and encourages the financial sector to support these initiatives.

  Teachers in the school system need access to educational materials on sustainable development, and to professional development that helps them stay current with issues and research. There will be an important role for business to play: working in partnership with the education system, supporting curriculum development with funds and expertise, and helping to clarify the links between economic development and the environment.

The Next Steps

Having said that public education and the sharing of a common vision and goals was an important first step towards the implementation of change, the members of the roundtable crew each made a personal commitment to become part of that process. Individually or in concert with one or two of the other participants, we spent some time thinking and talking about what we would do next to move us a step closer to our vision. We talked about action that we could take individually; we talked about recommendations for action that we could take back to our organizations; and we talked about efforts that we could try to co-ordinate at the local community level.

One group concentrated on summarizing several principles and recommendations[1] that had emerged from individuals and from our collective thinking in the course of the weekend. As a first principle, the group stated:

[1]For a complete list of principles and recommendations, see pages 26-28 of the *Report of the Third Roundtable on the Future of the Alberta Economy*, March 1992 (draft).

We believe that sustainable development -- a way of thinking that enables us to make progress on both the environment and the economy at the same time -- is the context for the government's economic development strategy.

On the basis of that principle, they recommended that

The vision and principles of the Alberta Round Table on the Environment and Economy be adopted as the cornerstone of the Alberta Government's "Toward 2000 Together" initiative.

Other groups concentrated on defining the ways in which all participants could continue to build on the work that we had done, and to move the discussion forward. They talked of building linkages with other forums currently in place in Alberta, and promoting with these forums the principles that had emerged over the course of the weekend. One group put forward a recommendation for a new mechanism:

We recommend that the government establish a multi-stakeholder Sustainable Development (SD) Commission empowered to:

1. *Take the vision of ARTEE further -- to continue to establish and refine our articulation of the principles of SD.*

2. *Review legislation, regulations, incentives, programs in light of those principles.*

3. *Recommend changes to move towards achieving SD.*

4. *Empower the public.*

The Commission would have a sunset clause specifying a two-year time limit.

The roundtable crew as a whole suggested that it would be important for the government to continue to build on the successes it has had in the past in bringing diverse stakeholders together to work on establishing a shared vision and guiding principles. They pointed to the "Clean Air Strategy for Alberta" as one such success, and a useful model to be followed. The final recommendation of the group, then, was that

Following the May Conference on the Economy, a multi-stakeholder group be established to work with all of the input of the "Towards 2000 Together" initiative and draft a White Paper on the Economy.

Roundtable #4

"Creating Competitive Advantage through a Knowledge-Based Economy"

Calgary, February 14-16

A New Era

We have become accustomed to hearing and saying that we have moved from the "industrial era" to the "information era," but have we truly come to grips with what it means to be functioning within an economy that has become both "global" and "knowledge based"?

> *For most of our history, Canadians have prospered by relying upon the resources beneath our feet...in the information age, we will all need to rely on the resources between our ears.*
>
> *Editorial, Charlottetown Evening Patriot, December 1989*

Throughout the roundtable process, we have been suggesting that in the "new economy" competitive advantage is no longer necessarily based on abundant raw materials and cheap labour -- that now it more often results from a supply of highly educated workers, from the ability to learn from others, from an ability to develop entrepreneurial managers, and from the capacity to innovate continuously. Canada as a whole does not seem to be taking significant bold actions to adjust to this new economy, and news of corporate downsizing and plant closures, increasing unemployment and growing public debt continues to sap our collective confidence. The two fundamental questions underlying our thought and activity through this weekend's journey were

What is stopping us in Alberta from turning information into knowledge, knowledge into intellectual capital, and intellectual capital into an economic engine designed to increase Alberta's competitiveness, wealth and quality of life?

What new actions will we need to take, what new structures will we need to develop, and what new alliances will we need to forge in order to compete in an economy in which human capital will be as important as physical capital?

Finding Common Ground

As we set off on our roundtable journey, we immediately found ourselves facing in microcosm what may be some of the major challenges of a "knowledge-based economy": finding a common language in which to talk of new concepts and phenomena that cannot be easily measured or defined, and building a shared vision and sense of purpose among a group of highly intelligent people with diverse backgrounds and perspectives. While much of our roundtable journey focused

on more specific problems and opportunities related to the future of the Alberta economy, we found ourselves returning throughout the weekend to the question of what we were developing the economy for -- to our ideal vision of the quality of life in a knowledge-based society.

Although "competitiveness" seems to have become one of the buzzwords of the nineties, it has become clear in the course of the roundtable journey that many Albertans are not prepared to accept competitiveness as a goal for its own sake. For many, it has connotations of a "win-lose" paradigm -- as if our goal were to raise our standard of living as a province at the expense of the standard of living of others elsewhere in the country and in the world. For some, this is an economic "given." Others suggest that we are moving towards a new paradigm of competitiveness that goes beyond a strictly adversarial approach and incorporates the principle of collaboration. The example that one participant gave is of a golf game in which the players give each other advice and assistance that helps them all improve their scores.

> *The nature of the game we're talking about is neither zero-sum nor fixed. I think that's what a knowledge-based economy is all about. It can be shared and wealth-creating at the same time.*
>
> *Participant comment*

We are also being forced to re-examine some of our traditional understandings of "wealth creation" in the light of changing global economies. Most of the models and structures that we are currently using assume that "the nation" is the economic unit against which success in creating wealth is to be measured, and that wealth is created only when goods and services are traded outside the nation's borders. Our concerns about Canada's deficit in international trade are very real and need to be addressed: we acknowledge that the web of social services and quality of life to which we are accustomed cannot be sustained much longer unless we renew our capacity and commitment to become a wealth generating economy. At the same time, we discussed the possibility that we may need new ways of defining and measuring wealth that are more suitable to the emerging knowledge-based and global economy.

However we define it, most of us agree that "wealth creation," like "competitiveness," is not an end in itself but a means to an end (albeit an important one) -- and that our real goal is the maintenance and enhancement of our "quality of life." We have also suggested throughout the roundtable process that "quality of life," as well as being a goal, is potentially a "strategic asset" that will help us meet that goal. In a "knowledge-based society," in which information rather than raw resources is the organizing principle of production, companies have more latitude as to where they can locate their operations. Since the highly-educated knowledge workers on which companies depend are placing increasing emphasis on "quality of life" in their career decisions, companies are beginning to base location decisions on factors of physical, natural and cultural environment -- and the availability of the sophisticated information and telecommunications infrastructure on which much of this knowledge work depends.

Focusing on People

> *One of the things that I would specifically like to achieve at this conference is to find out how we can restructure our reward systems and our measurements of status so that knowledge rather than power over resources and people starts to have value. I think that's the shift we're going to have to make if we're going to go to a knowledge economy.*
>
> *Participant comment*

The roundtable crew suggested that one of the most important characteristics of a knowledge-based society is that it gives us new ways of looking at the worth of individuals, as the knowledge, skills and talents of a society's people come to be recognized as the key to economic development. One of the biggest challenges of a knowledge-based society will be to put structures and systems in place that effectively use the great resource of "intellectual capital" that is available. We suggested that we need to reexamine how we as individuals, as organizations and as a society value information and knowledge, and how we think about the various processes related to it. It will be important to explore new ways of

- **Receiving Information and Knowledge:** We need to look again at the structures and processes that enable us to "receive" or take in information and knowledge. It is becoming increasingly accepted that "education" must not begin and end in the formal school system, and that individuals and organizations with a mindset and culture of "lifelong learning" will be better placed to thrive in the new economy.

- **Sharing Information and Knowledge:** Along with increased specialization of knowledge work has come the recognition that effective and timely sharing of information -- both within and among organizations -- is critical. We will need new alliances, structures, protocols and procedures that recognize the economic value of knowledge, and that enable this kind of information-sharing to take place.

- **Finding Information and Knowledge:** The group talked of the importance of having the infrastructure in place to allow fast and easy access to current research and data.

- **Creating New Information and Knowledge:** Underlying all our discussions was the assumption that a knowledge-based economy is characterized by rapid and dynamic change driven by continual innovation -- the creation and application of new information and knowledge. It will be important to create climates within organizations and within society as a whole which value creative thinking, encourage risk-taking, welcome mistakes and support the innovation process.

- **Applying Information and Knowledge:** Among the factors that we listed as crucial to our success in applying information and knowledge in a useful and productive way were the following: the integration of financial institutions into the innovation cycle; a culture that stresses partnership and collaboration among organizations and sectors; the ability to build

close links with the end user of the information or the product, and to tailor it to meet specific needs.

Breaking the Barriers

In our discussions of how we begin to break through the barriers that may prevent us from realizing the potential of a knowledge-based economy in Alberta, we looked at four general areas of activity:

- **An Enabling Climate:** There is a need to increase public awareness and change public attitudes around the issues of creating a knowledge-based economy. The role of the media will be crucial here, but the media will need access to solid information about the nature and dynamics of a knowledge-based economy -- how wealth is generated through the use of ideas and technology, what's happening in this area internationally, case studies and success stories from Alberta and from Canada as a whole. There is also a need for government to ensure that the regulatory environment and the system of taxation and incentives support rather than block the creation of a knowledge-based economy. Many feel that business is already over-regulated, and that new regulations are being introduced at a rapid rate. A review of current and planned regulations that includes a cost/benefit analysis and the addition of appropriate "sunset" provisions would seem to be indicated.

- **Infrastructure:** We recognized that in the new economy, the word "infrastructure" covers a wide range of supports. It can mean **physical infrastructure**, such as telecommunications networks or "data highways" (we discussed the importance of Calgary's "Infoport" initiative and the Canada-wide CANARIE project under this heading). It can refer to **service infrastructure**, such as well-structured and easily accessible databases of information needed by business. And, it can mean **organizational infrastructure**, including mechanisms that foster and facilitate the exchange of technologies (physical and informational), that link the producers and the users of technology, that bring financial groups together with research agencies to finance technology start-ups.

  The group stressed that while Alberta has worked hard at establishing an R & D infrastructure, research is only the first stage of the innovation process. The second stage is "commercialization": the process of taking a discovery and developing it into a wealth-generating application -- a new process, product, service, solution or invention. The final stage is developing the market for the new process or product. Two major problems are preventing us from moving the results of our research through the final two stages: the lack of "patient capital" to fund all stages of the project, and the lack of management, marketing (particularly international marketing), and financial expertise on the part of many researchers. There is a need for new types of linking mechanisms that bring together all the necessary ingredients for success in a knowledge-based economy. As an example of such a mechanism, we explored the "Innovative Business Enterprise" model, developed by the Canadian Institute for Advanced Research specifically to solve these problems at a "micro" level.

> *Innovation itself is a blend of technological, managerial and organizational innovation, and increasingly those three will have to work hand-in-hand in a knowledge-intensive society and economy.*
>
> *Participant comment*

- **Human Resource Development**: The roundtable subgroup focusing on questions related to human resource development established the importance of **maximizing human potential in Alberta continually** as a basic guiding principle of a knowledge-based economy. We talked of the need to create an environment in Alberta in which learning and knowledge are respected, in which the individual -- and the diversity among individuals -- is honoured, in which risk taking is encouraged, and in which a high value is placed on effective communication. The principles of **ethical use of knowledge**, **concern for appropriate scale** and **collaborative response to change** must underlie all of our activities.

  In our discussions of the specific human resources challenges facing Alberta, we discussed:

  - **The Need to Build a Closer Relationship Between Education and Business,** through exchange programs, opportunities for business to become involved in curriculum development and the financing of in-service professional development for teachers, co-op programs at the high school and post-secondary levels, partnerships between academic researchers and industry R & D departments, and "mentoring" programs to help motivate students.

  - **The Need to Reexamine Our Education System**, to clarify its mandate, to ensure that this mandate is understood by society, and to develop new mechanisms and supports that will contribute to the successful realization of this mandate.

  - **The Need to Increase the Amount of Training Done Within Business**, to help Canadian businesses recognize that -- far from being a bottom-line, profit-depleting cost -- training is a key contributing factor in the development of increased productivity and competitive advantage; and to create reward systems that adequately recognize and value training.

  - **The Need to Create New Mechanisms for Matching People with Opportunities**, at a time when high unemployment coexists with job vacancies in areas in which there is a skill shortage.

  The group outlined some general directions in which government, business and labour, and educational institutions should be moving to sponsor innovative action relating to the development of the human potential in Alberta.

- **Networking:** One common theme running through our discussions of the enabling climate, the infrastructure, and the human resource development activities that will move us towards our goal of creating a knowledge-based economy in Alberta was the need for increased cooperation and collaboration: the building of networks, the forging of strategic alliances, the

establishment of joint ventures and partnerships. This kind of collaboration is beginning to develop in Alberta. We discussed a number of existing models: the Conference Society of Alberta, the "Future of Work" initiative, PRECARN's activities in bringing together corporations, governments and universities to cooperate in pre-competitive research.

One participant proposed the creation of a new mechanism to provide leadership in marshalling and co-ordinating the existing resources of educational institutions, business, labour and government as we move toward a knowledge-based economy. This "Innovation Network" would be co-funded by the public and the private sectors, run by business, and governed by a sunset clause. Its mandate would be to build linkages among all the players, and to develop the information base that will be required for Alberta to compete successfully in the new knowledge-based economy. It would sponsor research and development, develop expertise in financing and marketing of knowledge-based industry (including exploring the possibility of developing a merchant bank), and provide assistance in the creation of new industry. It would strengthen the relationship between the education system and industry by nurturing exchange schemes and assisting in the development of new programs to meet emerging needs.

It will be important to publicize the increasing need for more cooperative effort, and to ensure that supports are in place to nurture these alliances. It will also be important to encourage those involved in existing initiatives exploring issues of human resource development in Alberta -- whether in the public or private sectors -- to ensure that these are open and inclusive processes to which all stakeholders can contribute.

Roundtable #5

Managing Diversity:

The Impact of Changing Demographics and Immigration on the Economy

Grande Prairie, March 13-15

Necessity and Opportunity

The design of the roundtable process as a whole was based on the premise that there is strength in diversity -- that the interaction of people with diverse backgrounds, experiences, expertise, and perspectives would give birth to creative new ideas and approaches. In Grande Prairie, the roundtable focus was specifically on the new economic realities that are turning the diverse workforce into both a necessity and an opportunity.

Our society as a whole is becoming more diverse, as people from a greater variety of ethnic backgrounds choose to make Canada and Alberta their home. Our workforce is becoming more diverse as the participation of women and people from minority groups increases. While these realities are now becoming recognized and accepted, a great deal of emphasis has been placed on the problems -- perceived, real or potential -- that these changes present. It has not been easy for many members of these groups to work their way into the white male-dominated management ranks, nor to function to their full potential in a relatively homogeneous culture different from their own. While progress has been made, much of it has come about through legislation in the areas of affirmative action, equal opportunity, human rights, and sexual harassment, rather than from a general recognition of the intrinsic value in the diverse skills and perspectives that all individuals bring to their work.

Changing Attitudes

In this roundtable, our goal was to move beyond the legalistic approach to diversity, to explore the new management challenges arising from increasing diversity in the workplace, and to define approaches for using this diversity to enhance the performance of our companies and other organizations. Our sense was that attitudes toward diversity are in the process of changing. These changes have been triggered by a number of factors -- among them

- **Changes in Demographics:** Demographics indicate that the labour pool will shrink dramatically over the next few decades, and that employers will have to compete for the decreasing number of available workers. They will no longer be able to rely solely on what has traditionally been seen as the source of management talent -- white males. Recruitment, training and retention of women and minorities will represent an important organizational challenge, and organizations that are able to do this well will develop a competitive advantage.

- **Changes in the Nature of Work:** While the increasing number of women entering the job market and altered patterns of immigration are changing the nature of the Canadian labour pool, technological developments are changing the nature of work. As we move into a "knowledge-based" and "global" economy, managers are finding that many of their

traditional management structures and practices are breaking down in the face of complicated problems and multi-faceted challenges that require creative, multi-disciplinary approaches.

If, as has been suggested throughout the roundtable process, the capacity to "innovate" is key, then the ability of an organization to make effective use of the varied knowledge and skill base of a workforce that is both better educated and more diverse than has been the case in the past is crucial to economic survival. Many managers are finding, however, that the "tools" and organizational structures on which they have depended are in fact more inclined to foster and preserve homogeneity than to nurture diversity.

Maximizing Human Potential

"Diversity" in this context is used in the broadest sense of the term, not as a "code word" for "ethnicity" or "disadvantaged groups," but as an inclusive word representing the unique contribution that each and every individual can make. While much of our energy during the roundtable was given to finding ways for the "dominant" culture to reach out to those who have been marginalized and enable them to become full and valued participants, we recognized that any culture -- even the "dominant" culture -- appears monolithic only from a distance. One participant suggested that our true goal was to find ways for 100% of the population to contribute 100% of what they have to offer -- a scenario in which both the individual and society are winners.

> *I think we're basically wasteful of people.*
>
> *Participant comment*

The baseline consensus reached by the group was that there is a lot of unrealized potential in Alberta that we can no longer afford to waste. Learning to make the most effective use of the diverse skills and talents of our population is no longer simply a moral or legal obligation; it is an economic necessity. We need to build a collective and inclusive vision for the future of Alberta that is based on the principles of diversity and of harmony.

In our ideal visions of the future, we suggested that there would be a movement away from the assumption that the individual who is now "outside" the organizational and societal structures that we have put in place will have to be integrated into these structures. Instead, we envisioned the structures themselves changing to accommodate the people. We envisioned an environment in which people want and are enabled to perform at a higher level -- an environment in which creative and productive work becomes the joy and passion of individuals, and in which "having fun" becomes a core value.

Acknowledging the Challenges

While the group felt it was important to stretch our current assumptions as to what's possible by contemplating the "ideal," we did not ignore or gloss over the obstacles to achieving our vision. It will not be a simple task. The Grande Prairie roundtable could serve as a microcosm of the difficulties of coming to a shared vision that honours the diverse perspectives and opinions of the group. Participants soon found that they were not engaged in an intellectual exercise; we were in fact coming to grips with the reality of the roundtable topic. For many, the most telling experience of the weekend was their own frustration with the process of building consensus among a diverse group of people with very different perspectives and priorities. For some, it was the growth they experienced when they found themselves being stretched in ways that they had initially had no intention of being stretched. For others, it was the excitement of achieving a sense of inclusive harmony that reflected rather than repressed the diversity of the group.

> *I think that's one of the things that diversity presents us with. We keep struggling for the "right answer" and in fact there isn't one. There may be one for me -- but there's not one for society as a group.*
>
> *Participant comment*

As a group, we found ourselves continually having to stop and ask ourselves how well we were doing at drawing out and valuing all of the resources of the group. We recognized how difficult it was to engage in truly effective communication even with the members of a very small group, whom we had come to know and respect and like in the course of a very intense weekend. We found ourselves struggling to find a common language in which to frame the topic. "Managing diversity," according to many, is not really the issue. We have "managed" diversity very effectively in the past -- essentially by ignoring or suppressing it, or by hiding it away in places where it causes a minimum of "trouble." The challenge now is to learn to "value" diversity or to "optimize" diversity. Some suggested that we in Alberta are not even entirely "recognizing" diversity, and that true recognition has to come before "valuing." For others, the phrase "managing diversity" reflected the very real need of managers in organizations for practical tools that would help them learn how to make diversity work in their own specific setting.

The group also challenged the way in which we in Canada have come to interpret the "competitiveness" issue. The word itself tends to imply that someone is going to lose -- to be left out -- and yet in our visions of the future we were thinking in terms of inclusiveness, collaboration and equity. It was suggested that the issue is not so much that the world has suddenly become more competitive, but that the context for competition is changing, and that what we need to come to grips with is a growing global interdependency. We in Alberta, said some participants, have tended to respond to the rapid evolution to a "knowledge-based" and increasingly "borderless" economy by turning inward. We need to become outward-looking, to embrace the changes happening here and in the rest of the world, to use our diverse ethnic and linguistic base as a key resource for developing global relationships and networks, to open ourselves to learning from what's best in other cultures around the world.

> *While "inclusiveness" could be seen as a soft social issue, the reality is if you're looking at national competitiveness, you've absolutely got to involve the whole of your population in a learning culture. So inclusiveness, diversity, equity -- these are not social issues anymore; these are bedrock economic issues.*
>
> *Participant comment*

Moving Toward Our Vision

What do we need if we are to bring about the changes we pictured in our ideal visions of the future? A number of requirements were discussed:

- **Need for New Understandings and Language around "Diversity":** One of the obstacles to change we noted was the presence of dysfunctional stereotypes based on ethnic background and gender. At the same time, we recognized that we all impose some degree of structure on the world, and that we need some common language in which to talk about the real differences in the way people take in and process information, approach tasks, communicate ideas, and express emotion. Although there are a variety of "models" available that attempt to provide this language, they all have their strengths and their weaknesses. There is a need for more dialogue about both the usefulness and the shortcomings of these models. There is also a real need to work at creating new approaches to understanding and communicating differences -- approaches that expand the number of "categories" we use to make sense of the world, and that encourage us to see these categories as dynamic, partial, provisional, short-hand forms that help us communicate with each other, without locking people into "boxes."

- **Need for New Tools for Managers:** As a corollary to this point, there is increasing recognition that in large part the management tools and practices we are using are screening out or suppressing diversity rather than nurturing and fostering it. Our selection and hiring procedures, our methods of criticizing and motivating employees, our evaluation and accountability systems, our assumptions about the way work and work space is organized -- all these work toward preserving a certain level of homogeneity in the organization. It is often difficult for people with credentials and qualifications earned in other countries to enter at a comparable level in Canada, in part because few Canadians have access to the requisite knowledge to interpret the Canadian equivalencies. Again, there is a need for open and frank discussion of the limitations of the tools that are currently available to managers, and for the development of new tools and approaches that overcome these limitations.

- **Need for New Approaches to Education and Training:** The need to create a culture of "lifelong learning" has surfaced in every roundtable. In the context of this topic, we talked about people's fear of change and the role of continuous learning in overcoming these fears. We talked of the need for new approaches to education and training that recognize the diversity of learning styles and needs. We suggested that there was an important role for exchange and co-op programs to help people open their minds to other

cultures or approaches to life and work -- not only in other countries, but within Canada. We explored the variety of skills that would take on increasing importance in a society in which diversity was valued as an asset: skills related to listening, cross-cultural communication (both the ability to speak different languages, and the ability to understand and respond to the cultural context), literacy, conflict resolution, problem definition and situation appraisal, applying knowledge, dealing with change, learning in many ways.

We also noted the current paradox in Canada of a high unemployment rate coexisting with a high job vacancy rate in certain areas. One large Canadian company has recently announced that if current trends continue, in a few years it will be hiring all the electrical engineers graduated in Canada each year. If we are to support our principle of realizing the benefit of all human potential in Alberta in the context of a changing economy, we will have to take a fresh look at what we are training people to do, as well as how we are training them.

- **Need to Reexamine our Immigration Policies and Procedures:** There may also be a role for immigration to play in filling these needs. There was consensus that most Canadians actually know very little about Canada's immigration policies and procedures. If asked for an opinion, many react emotionally to the perceived threat presented by "foreigners" coming in to take "our jobs" or "our places" in universities, or buying up land in "our neighbourhood." It was suggested by some roundtable participants that we would benefit from looking at immigration as an ongoing tool for economic development -- as it has been throughout the history of this country. Current immigration policies do not, however, tend to reflect the needs of the country in terms of diverse skills and education, but rather tend to reflect and reinforce the status quo. Some suggested that there was an urgent need to reconsider policies and procedures in light of changing economic and demographic realities -- to clarify how immigration policies could be used as a strategic asset in building the skilled human resource base that our companies will need in the global economy. Others warned against focusing on tying immigration policy so tightly to economic development that humanitarian principles became excluded.

- **Need to Reexamine our "Social Safety Net":** It was suggested that one way of maximizing human potential was to "turn our social safety net into a trampoline" -- while avoiding turning it into a cannon. In some situations, the existing regulations and the way our social programs are currently administered encourage people to remain on welfare, instead of serving as a springboard to new opportunities and activities.

Making a Start

How can we make a start at bringing these changes about? The variety of possibilities discussed can only be summarized here:

- At the "societal" level, it was suggested that organizations needed to come together in strategic alliances to share costs and expertise in moving ahead on these issues. One option would be for Alberta to build on the work that has already been done in the area of multiculturalism and create a Centre of Excellence (not necessarily a "physical" structure, but a collectivity of expertise) devoted to issues of valuing and working with diversity.

- At the "organizational" level, a need was identified for "experiential" processes that would help change the attitudes of top management, recognizing that even if change starts from the bottom up, it eventually needs support from the top. At the same time, it would be important to expand processes like the current roundtable process to include more people who are now marginalized, to have them identify obstacles to change and assist in the creation of methods of overcoming these obstacles.

- At the "individual" level, it was suggested that we need to move away from assuming that all change is going to come from government. As individuals, we need to champion what we think is right and take responsibility for addressing what we believe is wrong. We have to open our minds to change -- both incremental and fundamental -- and encourage others to do the same.

Roundtable #6

Cities and the Wealth of Nations:

The Role of Municipalities in Developing an Innovation-Driven Economy

Edmonton, March 20-22

A New Role for Municipalities

The assumption behind the choice of topic for the Edmonton roundtable was that a number of the issues and themes raised in the previous roundtables are going to be acted upon most directly through social, cultural and economic activities at the municipal level. As the wealth creating ability of our nation falters and concern increases over mounting public debt at the federal and provincial levels, those governments are responding in part by devolving responsibility to municipalities. Municipalities, which cannot by law run deficits, are under pressure to deliver more and better services for less money. While the traditional solution is to seek to expand the community's economic base, continuing expansion and development now has to be weighed against increasing concern for sustainable development and quality of life issues.

Some might argue that, unlike federal or provincial governments, the municipal governments have limited powers and may not wield significant influence. This may be changing. As citizens demand an increased role in decision-making, local governments may take on a new leadership role, as the level of government closest to consumers and voters, and therefore ideally most cognizant of the aspirations, values, and attitudes of its constituents.

Changing Realities

The discussion draft of the proposed new "Municipal Government Act" for Alberta notes that in North America there has been a shift from a desire for representative government to a desire for "participatory" government. It talks of the need for "empowering" legislation that allows for local determination of appropriate organizational structures and the application of emerging management techniques and practices. It suggests that municipalities should have the same powers and privileges as ordinary individuals, in addition to the authority to make bylaws. It also notes that

> *Intermunicipal cooperation, new forms of public/private partnerships, and interest in service quality irrespective of political responsibility, are all leading to the increasing irrelevancy of either inter-jurisdictional or organizational boundaries.*

Throughout the roundtable journey, crew members have made a conscious effort to look past traditional boundaries and categories, and to take a fresh and more holistic look at current realities. We chose in this roundtable to use the word "community" in all our working sessions, to encourage the group to expand their thinking past what we may have traditionally thought of as "municipal" jurisdiction. We also chose to ensure that the discussion did not focus narrowly on what "government" should do, by asking each of the small groups to look from a different

perspective at the new pressures on and opportunities for communities. Only one group was looking specifically at the role of community governments. Another group looked at the role of the "individual," the third that of the "not-for-profit" organizations, and the fourth that of the "for-profit" organizations.

In part, this decision grew out of our sense that communities are organic forms that depend for their growth on the vision, leadership, intelligence, commitment, persistence and creativity of the individuals and organizations of which they consist. In choosing to approach the topic from these different perspectives, we were also recognizing that one of the emerging themes of the roundtables is the need for all Albertans to shake ourselves out of the pattern of sitting back and expecting government -- at whatever level -- to do things for us.

Defining Terms

As in the previous roundtables, the group devoted considerable thought and discussion to defining terms -- to coming to a common understanding of the range of meanings that "community" might have, to identifying the components of the "not-for-profit" sector, to considering the implications of the "for-profit" designation. Again, our discussions led us to an understanding of how our traditional categories are becoming blurred: as the "not-for-profit" organizations become involved in delivering services that we have always thought of as "public," and as they begin to organize and manage themselves using techniques from the "for-profit" sector; as government enters into joint ventures with the "for-profit" sector for such purposes as the building of "public" infrastructure; as "for-profit" organizations take on increasing "social" responsibility.

Exploring Possibilities

Recognizing, then, that the "categories" were provisional starting points designed to ensure the exploration of the widest range of possibilities, each of the groups discussed from one of four perspectives the changes that will ideally take place at the community level as Alberta moves toward the future:

- **Community Government:** There was a sense among the group that local governments currently find themselves caught between increasing public expectations and declining financial resources. At the same time, there seems to be a growing public distrust of government -- perhaps in part the result of a trend over the past several decades of coming to expect government to be all things to all people at all times. In this context, there is a need for a redefinition of the role of the government. We need to reexamine what government is "uniquely" able to do, and be open to finding new ways of doing things that may be more usefully handled through other models.

> *Much of our legislation arises, however, from times when horses pulled ploughs through fields and the aroma of Grandma's baking rolls scented city streets. Today, combines are computer controlled and buildings hermetically sealed. Life in both urban and rural environments is complex beyond the wildest dreams or fears of our forefathers.*
>
> *Municipal Government in Alberta: "A Review of Yesterday and Today. A Proposal for Tomorrow." Phase I Report of the Committee Exploring a New Municipal Government Act for Alberta*

The group suggested that government's baseline responsibility is to create an enabling environment and to provide infrastructure and support mechanisms: "hard" infrastructure such as roads, waste collection, a telecommunications network; and "soft" infrastructure, such as organizational structures that bring stakeholders together in a collaborative problem-solving mode.

While governments must retain responsibility for ensuring that public services and infrastructure are in place, they should be looking for new models of providing these services through public/private partnerships and joint ventures. They should also be considering the new kinds of infrastructure and services that will be required to attract business and give the province a competitive advantage in the emerging economy. It was suggested, for example, that municipalities could work in partnership with the private sector and other municipalities on the creation of a fibre-optic telecommunication network -- a type of infrastructure increasingly seen as crucial to the development of new "knowledge-based" industries.

It was also suggested that if we accept the notion that the economy is driven by "innovation," we need to have infrastructure in place to ensure that promising ideas are matched with venture capital and with management expertise. As an example, the group sketched the broad outlines of a "Business Plan Development Consulting Assistance Corporation," that would serve as an "idea factory." Comprised of experts in a variety of fields (law, finance, marketing, human resources), the group would vet proposals from entrepreneurs and help them shape their ideas into a viable (and financeable) business. In return, the group would get some kind of interest in the resulting business. The assumption behind this proposal is that the major bottleneck in the startup of innovative new companies is not necessarily venture capital, but the expertise required to articulate an idea to the point where financial institutions can evaluate its potential, and to develop the idea into a sustainable business.

- **Private For-Profit Organizations:** The group examining these issues from the perspective of private "for-profit" organizations began by discussing the need for a new vocabulary to take us into the new world that is emerging. We have to redefine what we mean when we talk of "wealth creation," "quality of life" and "power." We have to find language that will help business understand the practical implications of what it means to be functioning in a "knowledge-based" economy. We also have to move past the connotations of the very phrase "for-profit," which suggests that these organizations have only one objective -- to make money. There was a sense among the group that if in the past business has tended to be

inward-looking and geared to the short term, in the future it will be important for business (both management and labour) to work together with government and educational institutions to create an environment for the common wealth of the people of the province. As these changes take place, it will be important for business to recognize its leadership role in the community, and to be proactive in taking up this leadership challenge.

> *I think business must take a more active role in the community. We sit back, and we complain about "they" and "them" -- but "they" and "them" is us. We have that responsibility.*
>
> *Participant comment*

For example, business is well aware of the need for a stronger transportation and communication infrastructure for the new economy. Business could respond to this need by taking the initiative of bringing together key players in business and government, to develop joint ventures aimed at improving needed infrastructure. It could work to make Chambers of Commerce more proactive and more committed to a collaborative approach, promoting Alberta as a whole, with larger communities supporting and helping smaller ones.

The biggest challenges will be related to education and training: both public awareness campaigns aimed at changing attitudes and building a shared vision, and specific skills and knowledge training geared to helping the province as a whole meet the challenges of the new economy. Business could partner with the education system -- contributing financial help, expertise and technological capability -- to work collaboratively on achieving a better "fit" between formal education and what will be demanded of students in the workplace. Management could partner with the unions, to work on the need for retraining people on an ongoing basis as skills and knowledge requirements in business and industry change. Unions could use their communication networks as a public education vehicle exploring the implications of the changes taking place in the world. The group recognized that in choosing to open themselves to this kind of collaborative approach, all these groups would be taking a risk. The group also said that an increased willingness to take risks and to accept failure as a means of growth will be a hallmark of the "innovation-driven" economy of the future.

- **Not-for-Profit (NFP) Organizations:** Although the group looking at the role of the "not-for-profits" struggled with the definition of what kinds of activities and organizations should be included in this sector -- which has only recently begun to be defined as a "sector" -- in the end they concluded that one thing these organizations have in common is a focus on improving the "quality of life" in a community. As "quality of life" becomes increasingly recognized both as a goal and as a strategic asset for the growth of the province's economy, these "not-for-profit" activities are likely to take on a higher profile. It was suggested as well that the role of this sector in the community may change as public sector roles change, and that they may take on more responsibility for the delivery of a range of services and supports. They may also have an important leadership role to play in building bridges among other organizations -- in encouraging academic institutions and the private sector to collaborate in carrying out needed research, for example.

If this is to happen, the NFP's will have to find ways of overcoming certain constraints. While the number of people volunteering to take part in NFP activities seems to be increasing, many organizations suffer from a lack of the leadership and management skills they need in order to effectively meet the demands being placed on them. Mounting public debt and a recessionary economy are making it more difficult for NFP's to obtain funding for their activities, and many organizations are mounting aggressive campaigns for financial resources. It was suggested by the roundtable group that in the long run, it will be important to find ways of moving beyond the competition for public support that now goes on among NFP's, to a model of cooperation and collaboration.

We have talked in a number of roundtables about the fact that our traditional list of "stakeholder groups" seems to be confined to business, labour and government -- and we have wondered what we can do to create a more inclusive society in which disadvantaged and marginalized groups are truly recognized as stakeholders. In this roundtable, we suggested that there might be an important role for not-for-profit agencies (which tend to have a closer connection with these groups) in working as a catalyst to develop a more inclusive mission and vision at the community level.

- **Individual:** While it is important to have enabling structures and processes in place to bring individuals together in a collaborative manner, the success or failure of these mechanisms ultimately depends on the attitudes and actions of individuals. The group discussing what the changes taking place mean at the individual level suggested that it will be important to

  - revitalize a spirit of "citizenship" -- recognizing that responsibility and accountability go hand in hand with rights; celebrating our citizens and community successes, and instilling a sense of pride in our communities; developing a greater political literacy, and encouraging the transition from representative to participatory democracy;

  - harness the underutilized and unused brainpower in the province -- by finding ways of including marginalized groups and ensuring that educational opportunities are accessible to all Albertans, irrespective of financial situation, age or station in life, or location of residence; by supporting the movement to aboriginal self-government and self-education; by providing retraining opportunities to help unemployed people learn new skills or apply old ones in new ways; by reexamining the way we credit out-of-province and out-of-country credentials and professional qualifications; by creating a "lifelong learning culture" and bringing stakeholders together to develop a vision of "Alberta as a Learning Organization";

  - facilitate the transition to an "innovation-driven economy" by encouraging strategic alliances among business, education and government; and by supporting entrepreneurial efforts with local venture capital (privately-raised community bonds, small business equity corporations, tax concessions), assistance with developing business plans (mentor programs, entrepreneurship programs run by educational institutions or NFP's), business incubator programs;

  - take risks; learn from mistakes; and reward excellence.

Working Together

> *This can't be an exercise that is saying, "This is what we want the government to do; this is what we want someone else to do." This has to be something that we take into ourselves. This is a major change we're talking about, and it has to be internalized.*
>
> *Participant comment*

Change is already beginning to take place in Alberta, as communities both large and small are finding ways of bringing together diverse stakeholders to map out new economic strategies for the future. A common theme running through the weekend's discussions was the need for all of the players to put aside parochial attitudes and work for the good of Alberta as a whole. An inward-looking approach can lead to needless competition, costly duplication of effort and a waste of valuable resources. We talked of the need to "connect," to develop an outward and global perspective, to share responsibility, and to work together in productive partnerships.

Roundtable #7

Prospects for Partnership:

Public, Private and Labour Relations in the 90's

Red Deer, April 3-5

Developing a Culture of Collaboration

One of the recurring themes of the roundtable journey has been the need to develop a culture of collaboration and cooperation in Canada. Earlier roundtables considered the potential of strategic alliances both within and across sectors, the prospects for public/private partnership in the delivery of services to the public, and the new emphasis on the facilitation role that could be played by government in bringing stakeholder groups together. In Red Deer, the focus was specifically on the effects of global economic change on relationships among management, labour, government and education in Canada. Our goal was to explore the implications of these changes for the role that each of these groups would play in the new economy, and to suggest new ways of bringing these groups together to jointly make decisions, solve problems and plan for the future.

> *Leaders of business, labour, government and other communities in Canada see global opportunities for value added and knowledge-based industries. Unfortunately, problems in realizing those opportunities are seen more clearly than approaches and strategies to be successful....We tend to blame each other for our problems. We don't agree on our relative responsibilities versus those that we entrust to others. We don't agree on the processes for managing change, creating wealth, sharing wealth, or our social responsibilities to the less fortunate. We don't have a shared vision of our future.*
>
> *"The Canadian Dilemma," from the Executive Summary of Private/Public Sector Cooperation to Improve Canada's Economic Performance*

"We Are All Beginners"

In this roundtable, the context for the weekend was set by participants who had been actively working on or studying both the Canadian experience in developing new collaborative decision-making structures, and international models from which we might learn. The clear messages from this work are that a new sense of cooperation and partnership is crucial to Canada's economic survival in the future, and that we in Canada are relative beginners in this area -- especially in comparison to European and Japanese standards. According to a very recent study of

Private/Public Sector Cooperation to Improve Canada's Economic Performance,[2]

> *There is a strong correlation between the effectiveness of cooperative processes, economic prosperity and even the health and well being of the population. Cooperative approaches emerging in Japan and Europe seem to give them a distinct advantage. It is not clear that our standard of living will survive global economic threats if we continue to rely as heavily on adversarial approaches as we have done in the past.*

Since the late 70's -- and especially in the wake of the recession of the early 80's -- there has been some movement in Canada toward developing such cooperative approaches. While a few broadly-based joint structures have been put in place in recent years (the Canadian Labour Market and Productivity Centre and the Canadian Labour Force Development Board, for example), there is a great need for more permanent or ongoing business/labour structures at the provincial and national levels.

At the individual enterprise and sectoral levels, we have had a number of successes in putting together joint responses to issues of health and safety, workers' compensation, training and adjustment, and -- more recently -- organization of work. Two such success stories were presented and celebrated by the roundtable group: the "Relationships by Objectives" initiative at Cardinal River Coal in Hinton, and the employee training centre in Cambridge, Ontario established by the United Food and Commercial Workers and Zehrs Ltd. There was a sense, however, that we in Canada need to pay more attention to analyzing our successes, learning from them, and promoting them widely. Too often, our approach to cooperation -- on all sides -- has been to present the other groups with the solution that we want them to buy into, when the real need is for processes by which groups can come together, first to agree on values and principles, and then to jointly address problems.

Changing Roles and Expectations

For our working sessions during the roundtable, we put together four small groups, each with mixed representation from labour, management, government and education. We then asked each of these mixed groups to look at the issues from the perspective of only one of these stakeholder groups. The results were as follows:

- **The Labour Perspective:** The group that took on the viewpoint of labour came up with an ideal vision for the year 2002 of a society in which both the standard of living and quality of life were ever improving. Within this society, they envisioned

  > *A workplace in which workers are fully employed, doing, causing, participating members -- engaged in monitoring, reflecting on and redesigning the nature of work.*

  The group pointed out that while there is much current talk about "empowerment," which is a noun and in some sense passive, their vision consisted of verbs and actions. Also within this vision of 2002,

[2]The study was initiated by the Public Policy Forum, funded by a variety of federal government departments and ministries, and co-chaired by the President of the Communications Workers of Canada, the Deputy Minister of Fisheries and Oceans Canada, and the President and CEO of Bell Canada Enterprises Inc.

The trade union is an equal, legitimate, proper, integral, and participating component of the relationship.

The relationship is one of power with rather than power over, and is characterized by cooperation and a sense of participation.

The risks of economic restructuring are shared among all the stakeholders.

Their suggestion was that we need to establish a process by which we as a society can move from a relationship characterized by advocacy and confrontation to a full partnership that will allow us to increase productivity, increase wealth creation, and improve both standard of living and quality of life. Acceptance of the legitimacy of the trade union movement to lead the labour perspective was identified as a prerequisite for this process. The first stage of this process might be likened to a "courting" period: employers and workers need to jointly identify small pilot projects that they can use to learn how the process might work, and that will begin to establish a sense of mutual trust and confidence. The group produced a long list of potential projects addressing a range of issues -- from employment equity to portable skills to outreach to educational institutions -- and actually planned the implementation of one project involving health and safety issues in the meat industry.

Other things that labour could do to help this process move forward would be to

- increase debate within the labour movement, with a view to overcoming opposition to cooperative ventures that is based on ideologies and/or bad experiences in the past;
- provide process skills training within the trade union movement;
- work on establishing bipartite bodies that bring labour and the employer community together (with government serving as facilitator and convenor, as necessary).

Finally, the group identified a need for the labour movement to reexamine its own role and goals, to ensure that energies are being deployed in useful areas.

- **Management Perspective:** The group considering issues of cooperation and partnership from the perspective of management identified a need for managers to go through a process of "enlightenment" -- a word implying something less formal and structured than "education," that involves looking at the world from a new and broader perspective. While we cannot forget that factors such as "productivity," "profitability," and "competitiveness" are all important to the viability of the company and the wealth creation ability of the country as a whole, we should not assume that these things are the sole responsibility (or for the sole benefit) of management. There is a role for management in initiating discussions with labour and government that begin by looking at the values and principles that underlie decisions made in business, and that bring these groups to some common ground on the values and principles which should inform our activities in the future.

> *The practices, processes and institutions that have been most effective have been those where both business and labour feel they have a real sense of ownership in decision-making at all levels, from conceptualization to implementation, to evaluation, to redesign.*
>
> *Participant comment*

Among the needs identified by this group as a point of departure for establishing and applying these principles and values:

- the need to redefine and broaden our notions of "stakeholder" groups beyond the traditional "labour/management/government" paradigm, to embrace the entire community -- including disadvantaged or disenfranchised groups;
- the need for organizations to operate on the principle of shared power, rights and responsibilities;
- the need to incorporate principles of compassion, empathy, open and honest dialogue;
- the need to "de-politicize" activities, to refuse to work from hidden agendas, and to "talk straight";
- the need to reexamine problem-solving processes that have been used in the past, and to jointly create new ones.

The group also felt that management, labour and other interest groups must become involved in the creation of a "Human Resource Development" (HRD) strategy for Alberta -- a strategy that looks at new ways of learning and creates an ongoing process for HRD planning, rather than defining a fixed plan based on current needs and realities.

- **Government Perspective:** The group looking through the "eyes" of government found themselves facing the paradox that they felt government should be "both involved and not involved." They noted that we are in a time of major economic transition, in which world realities are forcing a change in our views of where opportunities lie. Our ability as a province to adjust is being hampered by an outdated vision of the opportunities and by short-term planning on the part of all players. The role of government in such a time should be to facilitate the necessary transition -- to help guide the players through a process of change by providing information and data, outlining opportunities, developing supportive policies relating to training and development, and providing a forum in which the stakeholders can come together to plan and discuss.

  The group focused on three specific areas in which they felt there was an important role for government to play in initiating and supporting activity, and removing barriers to implementation and success:

- **Employer/Employee-Designed Training, Research and Development, Innovation:** Picking up on the notion that employers and employees have a shared right and a shared responsibility to improve the workplace, the group suggested that there is a tremendous hidden potential that could be liberated simply by increasing communication among employers and employees on issues of training, research and development, and innovation. Because processes and implementation related to these issues will (and should) vary from company to company, government's role should not be to legislate across-the-board programs in this area, but rather to promote recognition of the value of workplace-based training programs, and to facilitate their implementation when called upon to do so.

- **Interchange of Personnel:** It was suggested that government minimize legislative and policy barriers to fluid interchange of personnel among government, business, unions and educational institutions. If we could come to a common recognition of the expertise and human resources available within other sectors, and cease to think of careers as being confined to any one of them, we would all benefit from the increase in sensitivity to and understanding of the needs and concerns of others. We would also be creating a pool of people better-equipped to deal with our competitors in other parts of the world.

- **Workplace Discussion Mechanisms:** Again, the role for government is to remove legislative and policy barriers to increased dialogue within the workplace, and to promote the view that a healthy enterprise maximizes employee input, as well as making creative use of the input of government and educational institutions.

- **Education and Training:** As a fourth "cut" at the issues of building relationships and partnerships, we looked at the role of education and training in supporting this shift to a more collaborative culture. Our discussions were not limited to the role of the formal education system, but rather encompassed a broad range of human resource development approaches, activities and mechanisms. The group exploring this issue began with the premise that the world is imposing change on us, and that we have no choice but to respond and adapt -- or find ourselves in major trouble. In this context, the skills, techniques and processes that have been the basis of our traditional education and training systems will no longer be adequate. We need to reexamine our assumptions as to the skills and attitudes we will require for the future, and the processes by which we can continually develop these skills.

> *We observed that the traditional role of the education system was to teach people to be cogs that would fit into an industrial structure -- to shut up, not complain, not leave until the job's over -- that's the historic role of some of our education. We designed our schools to look like industrial plants, so that people would get the idea early. Well, now that's not a suitable education...we're at sea as to what the new skills are that we want people to learn.*
>
> *Participant comment*

The group suggested that we need to move to an approach to "learning" that looks upon education and training as a means to an end rather than as an end, that is not limited to a certain time of life or physical place, that values process as well as content, that respects abilities as well as credentials, and that is flexible rather than static. We are seeing a shift, the group suggested, away from dependence on our loyalty to an institution as a source of "job security," to increased individual responsibility for maintaining the skills that will give us "employment security" through a "lifelong learning" process. Collectively and individually, we need to pay more attention to learning how to learn and how to change, and to understanding the need for continual upgrading and development.

The group saw a role for everybody -- employers, unions, workers, government, educational institutions, individuals -- in promoting awareness of the need for change, and helping to shift public attitudes. They pointed to a need for a positive public learning campaign and new mechanisms for spreading "good news" stories. Existing forums and councils looking at these issues should be encouraged to expand their mandate and their memberships. New structures should be created to fill in gaps, in an effort to build as many broad-based multipartite venues for planning and implementing action as possible. The formal education system needs to be more responsive, and to work faster to accommodate change. As a society, we need to remove barriers to the recognition of out-of-province or out-of-country credentials, and of the value of experience as a learning activity. We especially need to be more creative in addressing the needs and issues of groups that are currently disadvantaged or marginalized.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

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ROUNDTABLE ORGANIZERS

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